BEM COMICS NEWS

APRIL #18
20 PENCE

Steve Gerber interviewed

NO. 485 JULY 35¢
SUPERMAN'S
ACTION COMICS
Presenting
THE CLASSIC STORY THAT ANSWERS ALL YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DAY THE MAN OF STEEL'S LIFE WAS CHANGED!

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SEPT 35¢
KAMANDI
THE LAST BOY ON EARTH!
FROM THE RAD-FLUNG FUTURE-WORLD OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES
IF KAMANDI IS KILLED IN THIS MOVIE...
...HE'LL REALLY DIE!

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BEM-18 April 1978

incorporating Fantasy Trader

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ART CREDITS:

Brian Bonhomme: 19 (left); Marcus Boon: 17 (right, pencils); Lawrence Bowkett: 18; Dave Byrom: 19 (lower); Greg Chown: 16; Phil Elliott: 7 (upper); Dave Hornsby: 6, 20 (pencils); Mark Leigh: 12 (upper); Rob MacGillivray: 15, 17 (right, inks); Black Jimmy Marshall: 1 ("Spot the Ball"); Joe Matthews: 7 (lower); M. Matthews: 8 (top); Terry Moore: 8 (strip), 17 (upper); Nick Neocleous: 13, and FT cover; Martin Noone: 9 (left), and FT text page; Pete Scott: 9 (right); Cameron Smith: 14; Superswipe: 5, 19 (upper), 20 (inks); Bob Watkins: 12 (lower); Geoffrey Whittaker: 8 (right); David M. Windett: 19 (right). Logos and separations by superswipe.

news

From June releases, the Dollar Comics will drop from 80 pages to 64, with no interior ads. Covers will be wrap-around normally, or with a separate illustration on the back; the inside covers will have a table of contents and a lettercol. On average this will mean an extra page of story per comic.

HOUSE OF MYSTERY is to change from a bi-monthly $1.00 comic to a monthly 50c comic, replaced on the Dollar Comics list by ADVENTURE COMICS. Since THE NEW GODS is cancelled after #19, the climax that was to have appeared in #20 will instead be in the first two $1.00 issues, putting THE MAN FROM NEVERWHERE's debut back to ADVENTURE #460, preceded by an ELONGATED MAN 7-pager. It looks as if the first rotating back-up 2-parter won't now be DR FATE, but METAL MEN by Conway & Fradon.

Now that the SUPERMAN film's release has been put back from June to December, DC have changed their schedules to fit in. SHOWCASE #105 has a 25-page O.S.S. war story, #106 features DEADMAN by Wein and Aparo, #107 stars THE CREEPER by Ditko, and the next three THE HUNTRESS by Levitz & Staton. WORLD OF KRYPTON is now in #s 111 to 113, by Kupperberg, Chaykin and Ortiz, to be followed by SUICIDE SQUAD in a 3-issue return visit scripted by Wein. The SUPERMAN'S LIFE STORY tabloid is put back to December, replaced by RUDOLPH'S SUMMER FUN -- however, the SUPERMAN #1 reprint will still be published in June, featuring a Neal Adams wraparound cover.

WEIRD WESTERN TALES is to gain a new back-up feature called CINNAMON, created by Roger McKenzie. It introduces a female gambler out to avenge the death of her father--killed by her brother. Jack Abel is the penciller, and didn't kill anyone.

DC PRESENTS #3 will co-star ADAM STRANGE --issue 4 features BLACK LIGHTNING, and GREEN LANTERN and HAWKMAN are also due.

Jim Sherman is doing some fill-in LSH stories, and will also draw the LEGION SPECTACULAR for October release.

Neal Adams & Berni Wrightson drew the cover for Limited Collector's Edition C-59 -- BATMAN'S WEIRDEST CASES, reprinting Batman #s 227 & 250, Brave & Bold #93, Detective #410, and Swamp Thing #7.

The annual JLA/JSA team-up will be in #s 157 & 160. A convenient (?) time warp involves the two teams with Jonah Hex, Enemy Ace, Viking Prince, Black Pirate, and Miss Liberty...

THE ORIGINAL SWAMP THING SAGA #2, with issues three and four of SWAMP THING by Len Wein & Berni Wrightson reprinted, is due out on May 2nd, inside an all-new wraparound Wrightson cover.

The Big Barda back-up for the new 50c MR MIRACLE is to be drawn by Joe Orlando; the first episode's written by Gerber.

In the JONAH HEX SPECTACULAR, Jonah's 30-pager, written by Fleisher and drawn by Russ Heath, takes place at the end of his career, with Hex as an old man.

In BATMAN FAMILY #19, suspense turns to terror as Batman investigates the gruesome secret of "The White Bat", by Denny O'Neil, Mike Golden & Craig Russell.

Rich Buckler will pencil HAWKMAN in his DETECTIVE back-up series. SHOWCASE #103 wraps up the Winged Wonder's solo flight, with "Adventures On Other Worlds" by Jack C. Harris, Al Milgrom & Murphy Anderson.

Superman battles Kobra in SUPERMAN #327, and the Kryptonoid in #328.

The first AMAZONS back-up for WONDER WOMAN, pencilled by Maurice Whitman, will be inked by the Crusty Bunkers.

Marvel have appointed three new editors to work under editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. They are Roger Stern (assisted by Jim Salicrup), who is responsible for CAPTAIN AMERICA, AVENGERS, IRON MAN, MS MARVEL, CAPTAIN MARVEL, X-MEN, MACHINE MAN, GHOST RIDER, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, MARVEL PREMIERE, BLACK PANTHER, MASTER OF KUNG FU, and JOHN CARTER; Bob Hall (assisted by Jo Duffy), who takes on DEFENDERS, HULK, DR STRANGE, DAREDEVIL, SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, HUMAN FLY, GODZILLA, MARVEL TEAM-UP, POWER MAN, DEVIL DINOSAUR, and TARZAN; and Richard Marschal, who has previously worked for comic strip syndication (assisted now by Ralph Macchio), who takes charge of the black & white line, MARVEL CLASSIC COMICS, special projects, and the new line-up of colour magazines. Writer/editors Archie Goodwin, Marv Wolfman, and Roy Thomas will continue to operate as before; the last Thomas-edited issue of TARZAN is #15, to be written by Don Glut, while he may also give up WHAT IF around issue 16. The $1 THOR comic mentioned in Bem-16 is now to be a 60c comic; a back-up series is to feature HERCULES.

RAMPAGING HULK stays cancelled with #9, but is replaced by a (Kiss-format) colour RAMPAGING HULK magazine. The first issue is by Doug Moench & Ron Wilson, with a wrap-around Val Mayerik cover--after that Archie Goodwin becomes writer-editor.

HOWARD THE DUCK goes bimonthly with #26, and will no longer be imported into the UK. The reason for the frequency cut-back given is that it will allow Steve Gerber & Gene Colan to get ahead with material for a new HTD colour magazine, planned to replace the 35c title altogether. Howard will be the mag's lead feature--a series of back-up strips will include MAN-THING.

A one-shot RED SONJA colour magazine is being prepared by Thomas and Thorne.

David Michelinie has left DC, and is now working for Marvel; he has taken charge of IRON MAN, scripted AVENGERS #173 over a Jim Shooter plot, and written a 2-part ANT-MAN story for MARVEL PREMIERE 44/45, to be drawn by John Byrne.

Jim Starlin has written & drawn an issue of GHOST RIDER, featuring a cross-country race against Death. Steve Leialoha and Nussraldeen inked this special issue.

Chris Claremont & Carmine Infantino are doing the full-length STARLORD story for MARVEL PREVIEW #14. The cover is by Jim Starlin. Chris is scripting JOHN CARTER with #16, with art by Ernie Colon.

Ralph Macchio is writing a 2-part tale for MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, featuring Captain America and Man-Thing; he is also doing a MARVEL PREMIERE two-issue showcase for the BLACK WIDOW, drawn by George Perez.

Don McGregor's PALADIN story, drawn by Tom Sutton, should appear in PREMIERE 43. He has also scripted a KA-ZAR adventure, drawn by strip artist Bob Lubbers, which is also intended for this title.

Other MARVEL PREVIEW projects include a new hero, AMERICAN EAGLE (Doug Moench & Ron Wilson), plus JACK OF HEARTS (Mantlo & Giffen) and ICEMAN (Jo Duffy).

Mike Vosburg has signed an exclusive contract with Marvel; his first assignment is to take over the bi-monthly MS MARVEL.

Archie Goodwin, writer/editor of STAR WARS, has got Carmine Infantino & Terry Austin as his regular art team.

KULL is cancelled with #29, allowing him time to defeat Thulsa Doom and regain his throne first; he will continue to appear in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN.

Treasury Editions this summer include CLASSIC HULK BATTLES, SPIDER-MAN (Marvel Team-Up stories), THE AVENGERS, and an all-new WHAT IF by Jim Shooter and Sal Buscema, starring the Avengers, Dr Doom, the FF, Spider-Man, and Daredevil, set in the mid-sixties.

The 1978 TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL will guest-star NOVA, by Marv Wolfman, Sal Buscema, Frank Giacoia & Dave Hunt. THOR ANNUAL is by Thomas, Simonson & Janson. The MARVEL TEAM-UP ANNUAL by Claremont & Chaykin has Dr Strange and Ms Marvel joining P. Parker against Silver Dagger.

Dave Kraft will be the new writer for TARZAN, starting with #16. Ed Hannigan is to write POWER MAN, from #54.

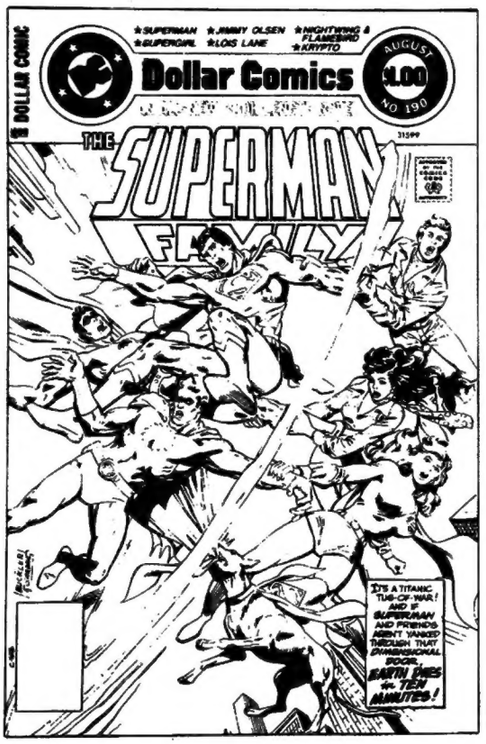
Alan Kupperberg is drawing some HOWARD THE DUCK issues; he's also the new regular artist on THE INVADERS from #29 on, except #31, a fill-in by Chic Stone & Bill Black. While Roy Thomas moves house (#s 29-31), Don Glut will fill in on the scripting. Frank Robbins moves on to DAREDEVIL.

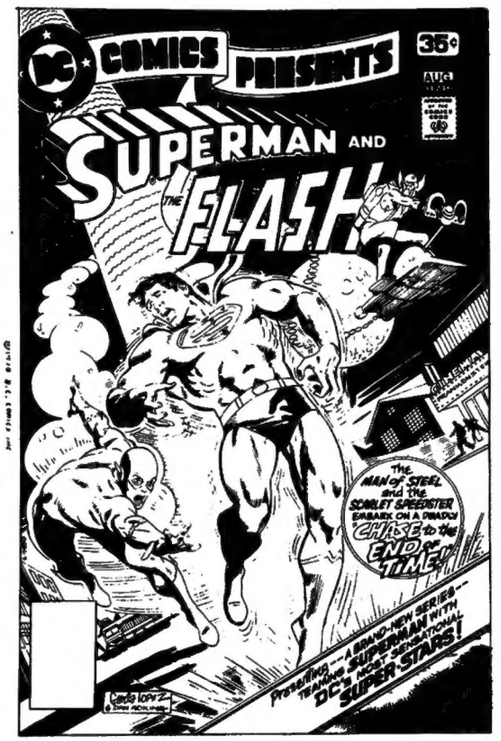
John Romita Jr will draw IRON MAN with issue 115, with Bob Layton on inks. Mike Zeck is the regular MASTER OF KUNG FU penciller, starting with issue 67.

Frank Brunner has drawn a cover for RED SONJA--however, since Frank Thorne wants to do his own covers, it won't be used for a while.

The debut of the CONAN daily strip has been delayed again, until autumn.

It is with regret that we note the death of John Verpoorten, a talented inker and, since 1970 Marvel's head of production. He will certainly be missed.


Dollar Comics
$1.00
AUGUST
NO 190
THE SUPERMAN FAMILY
IT'S A TITANIC TUG-OF-WAR! AND IF SUPERMAN AND FRIENDS AREN'T YANKED THROUGH THAT DIMENSIONAL DOOR, EARTH DIES in TEN MINUTES!


DC COMICS PRESENTS
35¢
SUPERMAN AND THE FLASH
The MAN OF STEEL and the SCARLET SPEEDSTER EMBARK ON A DEADLY CHASE to the END of TIME!
Presenting--A BRAND-NEW SERIES--TEAMING SUPERMAN WITH DC's MOST SENSATIONAL SUPER-STARS!

WEIRD HEROES, edited by Byron Preiss, is moving from Jove/HBJ (formerly Pyramid Publications), and changing its name. New series planned for inclusion include "I--ALIEN" by J. Michael Reaves, and "GUTS", developed by Byron Preiss.

The SHADOW paperback series in America is continuing--number 19 is the latest I have picked up. The covers are still by Steranko, but have, from number 14, become more gaudy, and in the pulp tradition.

Gold Key are publishing a TV tie-in for HAPPY DAYS, going on sale in August as a bimonthly. GOLD KEY CHAMPION is cancelled with #2, featuring Mighty Samson. STAR TREK is going monthly in the 35c format; BORIS KARLOFF and RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT are also monthly, in the 50c format.

STAR REACH will have 8 pages of colour, plus 32 of black & white, for $1.50, from #12; a new companion zine is IMAGINE. A pair of 32-page $2.00 colour comics, PARSIFAL and HOWARD CHAYKIN COMICS & STORIES #1 (Cody Starbuck) are due this spring.

COLLECTOR'S DREAM is changing direction --issue 5 on will be around 128 pages for $1.95, published quarterly.

John Bolton is now drawing the BIONIC WOMAN strip for LOOK-IN.

20th CENTURY TOAD PRESENTS

CAPTAIN FROG

LAST ISSUE OUR HAPLESS, HOPELESS HERO WAS LEFT FACING THE GREAT RASTAFARIAN ROMAN EMPEROR...

BLACK CAESAR!

SACRÉ COEUR! MON DIEU! STONE THE CROWS!

UNBEKNOWNST TO THE COURAGEOUS CAPTAIN, THINGS ARE LOOKING UP...

STAY YOUR HAND, OAFISH ONE!

QUEEN BODICE AND THE ANCIENT BRITS!

RUN FOR IT EVERYBODY! THOSE GUYS EAT ROCKS AND TWIGS FOR BREAKFAST!!

GOT IT IN ONE BLACKY! FROM NOW ON YOUR RASTAMAN VIBRATIONS WILL DANCE TO A DIFFERENT TUNE! I'M TAKING OVER THIS LITTLE SIDESHOW!

WHAT AM DE MEANING OF THIS OUTRAGE? WHERE AM MY LOYAL LEGIONARIES?

AS THE ROMAN SPECTATORS FLEE THE ARENA WE LEARN THE ANSWER TO BLACK CAESAR'S QUESTION...

LISTEN YOU GUYS! THE WAY I FIGURE IT, THE BOTTOM HAS TO DROP OUT OF THE EMPIRE BUSINESS SOMETIME. SO I'VE SUSSED OUT A LITTLE INSURANCE POLICY FOR WHEN WE GET HOME TO BELLA ITALIA, SUNNY SICILY AND THE VICARIOUS VATICAN!

KNOW SOMETHING RAZZY? I KINDA LIKE YOUR STYLE!

SO FROM NOW ON YOU'RE WORKING FOR ME!

I'LL EVEN LET YOU FINISH THAT LITTLE JOB YOU WERE DOING!

ONLY THIS TIME MY SERFS WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH A HELMET TO COVER YOUR NOSE IN CASE HE TRIES THAT GARLIC-POWERED BREATH TRICK AGAIN!

BRING THE LITTLE RUNT TO ME! OR IN DE WORDS OF DE FAMOUS SAYIN'- NEVER MIND THE DREADLOCKS- HERE COME BLACK CAESAR!

WHILE ALL BUT UNNOTICED IN THE SHADOWS...

QUICKLY PARABOLIX! WE MUST THINK UP A PLAN OR THE GALLANT STRANGER IS DOOMED!

SSSUIVRE

IN CONVERSATION WITH STEVE GERBER

interviewer: Howard Leroy Davis
transcriber/primary editor: Adrian P. Webb

HLD This is Howard Leroy Davis, and I'm talking comics with Steve Gerber. Steve is the writer/editor of the comic books that relate to Howard the Duck, as well as a good deal more. We'll get into some of the other things Steve does as we go along, but I think that the first question that we're concerned with is-- just who is Howard the Duck?

SG Well, Howard is a cartoon duck from another dimension trapped in the world of human beings. He talks, smokes cigars and recites polemics, and in general makes a nuisance of himself. That's the premise of the strip.

HLD I know he first showed up in a horror comic called MAN-THING for Marvel Comics --but since then he's branched out, and he's now appearing in the Philadelphia Bulletin, among other places.

SG He appears in his own comic book, and in about 70 papers across the country.

HLD Some people have commented on the thought that he seems to look like Donald Duck. What's the story on that?

SG I disagree, I think he would disagree, I really don't know what to say about that. I don't see any resemblance between the two...they're both ducks!

HLD I suppose that, if we were in a world of ducks, they'd say that all humans look alike, too.

SG Exactly! I think it's an insult for that reason--a racist slur, (LAUGHTER) or a species slur or something, against him to say that he looks like Donald.

HLD I know that in your formats you point out that Howard has been a "hard-hat" worker, a fighter, a rock musician I believe, and a great many things in his lifetime. However, he usually finds himself unemployed.

SG He can't hold a job, he's got too big a mouth! That's the problem, too big a "bill" I guess you'd have to say. He just won't tolerate any...er, you know, I don't know if there's a polite word for it, but I think you all know what I'm talking about...from his employers. So when something displeases him, he makes a point of talking about it, and generally just walks out!

HLD Waddles out?

SG Or is escorted to the door, one or the other.

HLD In his appearances in the newspaper, there is a difference in the way one writes a daily strip, as opposed to writing for the comic book. I wonder if you could elaborate on that?

SG Well, the problem with newspaper, or with newspaper comic strip, is that you don't have literally the physical space to get the depth of characterisation or plot that you do in comics, where you have 17 pages as opposed to 3 panels a day, to tell a story. So, for that reason the stories have been a lot simpler; there's been a lot less dialogue, again purely for reasons of physical space, and again as I say less depth in terms of characterisation. It's a case where characterisation has got to develop more over a period of time, rather than in one intense situation, or scene.

HLD In the comic book of course you can develop this sort of thing, and I think that those of us who read the comic book with regularity will realise that there is a great deal of your philosophy that gets involved in this particular situation. Of course MAN-THING, the book that Howard derived from, also was a deeply philosophical thing in talking about the relationships of people, and phonyness versus genuineness in the world. Can this sort of thing carry through into the newspaper strip?

SG I think it can. But it has to be done with less intensity, probably, than in the comic books -- only because of the time, the differential in how much you can do in a single strip in a single day and then expect people to remember it through to the next day. They have a whole day of events in their lives between the time they read Howard the Duck at 6 o'clock one evening, all that has gone between Howard's last line on Monday and his first line on Tuesday. It's an awful lot to expect people to follow a philosophical dissertation from one day to the next in that format. So it's there, but it's done in a somewhat lighthearted, or, er...

HLD Shallow?

SG No, not shallow; I don't think it's any more shallow, I think that it's funny, I was going to say less deep. The ideas can't be explored in as much detail in the newspaper strip as they are in the comic book.

HLD There is a new strip in a rival newspaper here, and this strip is the STAR HAWKS strip which is done by Ron Goulart and Gil Kane. Are you familiar with this?

SG I know a little bit about it, I know the difference in the physical format of the strip. I'd be interested in trying that with Howard, and yes it would give a little more room and leave a more definite impression with the reader than the three panel a day format. But again even then it's a lot to expect of somebody to carry that whole idea in his head from just one reading of the strip in the evening or the morning through the entire day to the next day. It's asking something that the media can't really sustain, that's the problem.

HLD For those who are reading this that don't know what STAR HAWKS is -- it's a particular comic strip involved with space opera/science fiction, which occupies the space of two normal comic strips, and therefore instead of the three panels of story a day they get in usually five panels, which is quite an advantage.

SG It is, it's like giving someone a whole page of comic book, for example, in a day, and you can certainly do a lot more in that than you can in the standard three panel a day format.

HLD I was talking to Ron Goulart, and he was saying that Sunday was a throw-away day. What he did was to bring the story to a certain point on Saturday, and then something would happen on Sunday that did not advance the regular story at all, but which in itself was an interesting incident. How does this relate?

SG Absolutely. It's a standard thing with all comic strips. What you said applies to Howard as much as it does to virtually every other strip, the only exception I would think being Prince Valiant, who only appears on Sunday.

HLD I can think of a couple of others. There's MANDRAKE, THE PHANTOM and FLASH GORDON, whose Sunday continuity is not the same as the daily continuity at all.

SG That's the other possibility, to do a completely separate story in the Sunday strips. But the syndicates tend to frown on that now, it's something that was done a lot more years ago, or in older strips, than it is today.

HLD In terms of your work in comics; as I've said before, you worked on the Man-Thing, who was a 'muck monster', very much related to something our older people will remember as the Heap, which was created a long time ago. But you also have written Daredevil, and more recently Mister Miracle for DC. How do you deal with these heroic stories?

SG I try to make them as human as possible. I try to portray their reactions in these basically ridiculous situations --with the super-villains, and so on-- in the way a normal man or woman would react to being placed in a situation like that, you know.

HLD Do you see the superhero as a ridiculous character?

SG I do -- and in some ways, like Frank Herbert, I see it as a very dangerous concept. Not so much in the comic books, but in the tendency to hero worship in real life, "Tis the stuff of which demi-gods are made."

HLD Well now, the Man-Thing, the monster we mentioned earlier, was essentially a passive creature -- so how did he fit into stories?

SG The Man-Thing's responses were totally reactive, he was unable, really, to

initiate any action himself, except by walking into a scene and scaring people, most of the time. So he was an empathic creature, he would feel what the people around him felt, and what little bit of him that was still human would react to those feelings.

HLD And Howard is decidedly not a hero?

SG No, Howard is like most people. He behaves heroically sometimes, stupidly at other times, illogically at other times--and he has a full range of human responses, really.

HLD Yes, I would say about the only thing that distinguished him from anybody else is the fact that he has an extraordinarily big mouth, and the fact that he's a duck!

SG That's it! People are constantly refering to him as the most "human" of Marvel's characters, when he's not human at all, really. Physiologically, he's not human.

HLD Here you are--how old are you now?

SG I'm thirty.

HLD You're thirty years old, you're middle height, dark hair, you're normal weight --you know, you're the average guy.

SG Except that I'm extraordinarily good-looking... (LAUGHTER)

HLD I'm sorry, I shouldn't leave that out! But, after all these average aspects are sum totalled, it seems to me you're an awful lot like Howard the Duck?

SG Howard is an extension of my personality, I think. He's very much like everybody, in some aspect or another. I tend to shoot my mouth off too! Howard is more vocal than I am--he says things that a human being could not say and be excused for. He gets away with things, because he is a duck! They are things that I think I would like to have said at certain times.

HLD Looking at the future of the stories, is there any possibility that Howard will ever get home and give us a chance to see where he came from?

SG No, I'm never going to show Howard's world, the original world. We will let him talk about it, and he does, he refers to it quite often. But I don't think we'll ever show the dimension from which Howard hatched, where he came from.

HLD Are we then to assume it's just an ordinary world, just like other worlds?

SG Except that it's populated by talking animals, yes.

HLD Okay. That leads us to a possibility that I've heard discussed. Marvel's WHAT IF comic deals with and explores not the normal continuity that occurs within the comic book world, but the alternate continuity that might happen. I heard they're contemplating sending some human being into Howard's world. Is that so?

SG That's possible. It may not even be a WHAT IF story, it may really happen. At the time Howard was tossed into this world? No one really knows...

HLD I don't know of anybody that's missing!

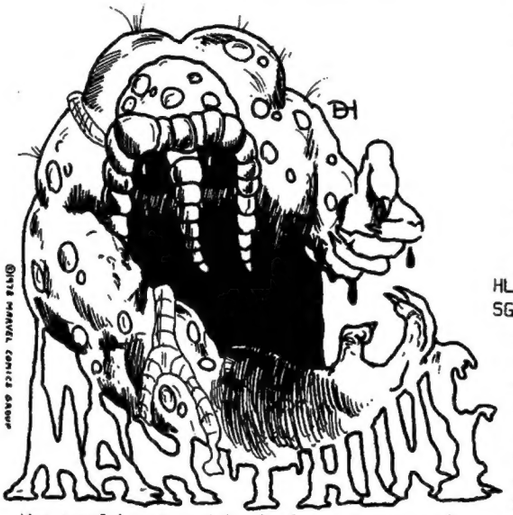
SG Yes, well. I wouldn't be crazy about the idea of them doing a story like that, but if they felt like it I think it'd be okay. I just don't want to do it in Howard's book.

HLD I think everybody is familiar with the idea of spin-off; Howard is certainly a spin-off of the original Man-Thing concept. One interesting character in the Howard mythos is the Kidney Lady. Tell us a little bit about her.

SG The Kidney Lady is a very strange old woman, who believes that there is a massive international kidney poisoning conspiracy afoot. Led by the makers of tobacco products, greasy foods, and anyone who holds hands, kisses or engages in any physical contact. She is a maniac basically, who's searching around for other maniacs to join her cause. I think the Kidney Lady could handle a book of her own. She's based on a real person I met in Times Square.

HLD A real New Yorker?

SG Oh yes, absolutely. I was in a little restaurant or something on Times Square, and this strange woman walked in, and walked directly to my booth. Not even pausing to look at anyone else. I mean, she was set for me by the look on her face. She leaned over the table, and whispered directly in my face, "They couldn't steal your kidneys in a place like this, could they?" And I really didn't know what to reply. But she sat down in the booth right behind me, so that her back was to mine, and did a half hour of this material about how



the world was out to destroy everyone's kidneys. That's where she came from; I couldn't have created a character like that, she's real!!!

HLD Incidentally, for readers of the Howard comic strip, that scene was repeated at just about the beginning of August last.

SG Right. It was basically the same scene, except that it happened to Howard of course, not to me.

HLD Yes, and of course she singled out Howard as being one of the kidney stealers too.

SG She believes Howard is the head of the kidney conspiracy. For no particular reason, she has no evidence to back that up. He smokes on buses, that kind of thing, but that's really the only evidence she has that he might be the head of this conspiracy.

HLD One thing that interested me about Howard was, of all comic characters you speak of him as being the most human, and one thing that Howard has done that no other comic character has done, to the best of my knowledge, is that he had a nervous breakdown!

SG Yes, he did. He ran for President, lost because his campaign was ruined by a foreign power, Canada. Following that incident, it was just like all his experiences with the humans had just been too much for him. He cracked up, quacked up!

HLD He quacked up! Okay. Are we to assume then that he has now got it together, and is going to stay normal, or he's going to stay on an even keel, perhaps normal is a questionable word, for a while?

SG He hasn't got it <u>all</u> together, but he's more in control of himself than he was. He's still a fairly unstable character. He's sort of constantly, and probably will be forever, and probably was before the actual breakdown, sort of tottering on the edge of it all the time. It's a question of his trying to maintain his own stability most of the time. But I think that if that much strain ever occurred again, who knows, he could have a relapse.

HLD When he had his breakdown, he really went bananas! I was surprised that you were able to envision him being cured so quickly.

SG He did go bananas. But it was a <u>near</u> nervous breakdown. He never really went all the way over the edge, he was never really completely catatonic, he was never utterly unable to deal with it. He was hearing voices and having very bad dreams, but it was still borderline at that point. He was also conscious still of reality, of the exterior world. Actually, what cured him was interesting too, he wasn't cured that easily, he had to be EGGsorcized by the Son of Satan. He first had to experience oneness with all of Cleveland before he was cured.

HLD What do you have against Cleveland?

SG Oh, nothing! The Cleveland in Howard is a fictional metropolis based on all of the bad things about every midwestern city. I lived in St Louis, grew up and lived there for 22 years, and I have travelled around a bit, in the heartland as they say. The Cleveland in Howard is an amalgam of all those cities. We just picked on New York for too many years at Marvel Comics. I wanted to go after someplace else for a while. I'd already done St Louis actually -- I'd destroyed the Gateway Arch and ripped up the site of the 1904 World's Fair, and that sort of thing. So it's a fictional city really, it's not the real Cleveland.

HLD I'm not so sure I accept the fictional quality of Cleveland. I recall in HTD number 1, where Howard was so depressed at being caught in this universe that he didn't belong to, that he contemplated suicide, and yet he refused to do it in the Kihauga River.

SG Right. We've used real locations, but we've also created fake locations. Sunspot Slope--the only spot in Cleveland that gets any sun, for example. There is no such place, of course, but...

HLD No place gets sun!

SG No place gets sun, actually--(LAUGHTER) -- as far as I know. But there's certainly no place called sunset slope, sunspot slope, I can't even say it! So we've created fake locations, in addition to doing real things like the Kihauga River, and so on.

HLD We will look forward to seeing these fake locations in the future, and I thank you very much for talking to us, Steve Gerber.

MADE IN BRITAIN

Asterix books should be easier to track down now, as they've now entered the world of "film tie-ins"--the ninth book in the series has now been translated and published as "Asterix and the Normans", which, consulting the list I gave in Bem-15, just leaves "Le Tour De Gaule" (≠5) and "Asterix En Corse" (≠20), plus the latest pair, "Obelix & Co" (≠23) and "Asterix in Belgium" (≠24), to come, plus any French material that has not yet been collected into albums, and related books like the "Dogmatix" series. As many of you will know, René Goscinny, the creator and writer of the series, died late last year. But what a heritage he has left us!

"Les 12 Travaux d'Asterix", mentioned in Bem before as the tie-in album to the latest Asterix cartoon film, has now appeared, with the title translated curiously as "The Twelve Tasks of Asterix" instead of "The Twelve Labours..." It has 60 pages for £2.40, and is not in comics form -- rather, it is illustrated text, and not quite up to the standard of the regular albums, since the emulation of the twelve labours of Hercules makes for a rather disjointed story. Nevertheless, there's some excellent Uderzo art here, and some genuinely funny moments--if the film doesn't come your way, get the book, and if it does, well, it'll make a good souvenir.

"Asterix And The Normans", at £1.80 for the usual 44 pages of art, is fine middle-period Goscinny & Uderzo, although the title is rather a misnomer--the gentlemen who visit our Gaulish village are Norsemen. While they may be the forebears of the Normans of 1066 and all that, these are vikings, brawny fellows who don't know the meaning of the word fear -- so they've come to Gaul to find out! The only reason to call them Normans is to make occasional jokes about Conquests, as far as I can see. As ever, it is impossible to summarize the plot, involving as it does vikings convinced that knowledge of fear will make them invincible, plus the chief's nephew Justforkix, and the villagers -- but if you like Asterix, you'll love it all.

Staying with the 8½" x 11½" albums, "Thunder In The West", volume 2 in the Lieutenant Blueberry, came out recently, with 46 pages of story for 85p in softback from Egmont/Methuen. The tale begun in "Fort Navajo", and to be continued in "Lone Eagle", rolls on, with the red indian uprising spreading, and Blueberry the only man who may be able to stop a blood-bath. It would make a marvellous western movie--if 5-hour films ever come into fashion! Although it's translated by Anthea Bell & Derek Hockridge, who perform the same service for Asterix, this is serious stuff, I should mention; Jonah Hex fans would appreciate it, I'm sure.

On the weekly comics racks, you'll have seen STAR WARS WEEKLY, eight pages thinner than the rest of the Marvel crew--the money they save is being used to provide competition prizes, not to mention a profit to keep the British Marvel operation viable. COMPLETE FANTASTIC FOUR seems to be on its last legs--even newsagents with a generous number of the other titles don't have more than one or two of it, if any. A comic with only one feature has only a limited appeal.

I haven't given much space lately to BULLET, from D.C. Thomson. In a strange double blow, it went up a penny to 8p with ≠105, and down by four pages to 32 with ≠108, which could mean that circulation isn't too healthy--it would be a shame if it was to follow its old adversary ACTION and cease publication, as it presents a wide variety of stories, changing the roster regularly.

As I write, BULLET ≠110 (March 18th) is the current issue; Fireball is cover featured, as he is roughly every third week, and his 8-page adventure involves his arch-enemy the Cat and a macabre friend of hers who's half robot. "Twisty" is a football strip, with a little bit of pigeon racing for good measure. while "Steelback" involves a giant crocodile in darkest Africa, circa 1908. There's a 2-page ghost story narrated by the omniscient Solomon Knight, world war II action with "3 Men In a Jeep", the conversion of "Wrecker Renton" from vandal into a sensible Air Training Corps cadet, and "Cadet Fireball", the adventures of the comic's main star as a youth. It's quite a varied diet, with art to match!

I haven't seen a HOUSE OF HORROR for a month or so (House of Hammer, it used to call itself)--newsagents seem to be more interested in SF than horror, as the wide circulation of Dez's STARBURST attests. HoH 18, I gather, reprints a Neal Adams strip done for a book-and-record set in America, and printed in the second Adams treasury; issue 19 adapts "The Reptile" by Brian Lewis, while HoH 20 contains the "Captain Kronos" film, adapted by Steve Moore & Steve Parkhouse, and the following issue should bring the third episode of Father Shandor by John Bolton, plus a reprint of "Out On A Limb" by Wrightson.

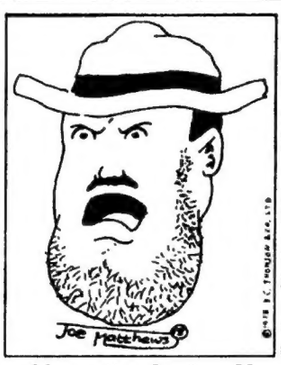
Still on the subject of future events, Colin Campbell tells us that a new weekly comic will be out in early April from Argus Distribution, TARGET--it will have 20 pages of TV tie-in strips featuring Hazell, Charlie's Angels, Cannon & Kojak, plus pin-ups, interviews & competitions; posters in the first three issues are to feature Superbikes, Supercars, and those dishy detectives who work for Charlie.

2000 AD continues on its merry way; prog 56 has the most blatant rip-off since way back in prog 27 in the "Future-Shock" department, as Alan Hebden re-heats the old "time-traveller changes past, returns to find the present changed" gambit. I'd prefer to see this comic in a format like SCOOP, with slick paper and at least half the pages in full colour; if sports fans can support a 15p weekly, why not SF fans too? Prog 59 sees an end to the Dan Dare stories starting on the front cover -- we return to covers featuring the various heroes in turn, starting with Judge Dredd by Mike McMahon.

The extreme weather this winter held up both 2000 AD and BATTLE-action by almost a week--but both are back on schedule now. B-a even had trimmed edges for 5 weeks!

And on that exciting news (?), time to draw another instalment to a close. Joe Matthews has kindly volunteered to keep us all up to date on the funny papers, which helps keep my newsagent's bill in check, so it's goodbye from me until next time, and hello from him! -RUAN LANIHORNE

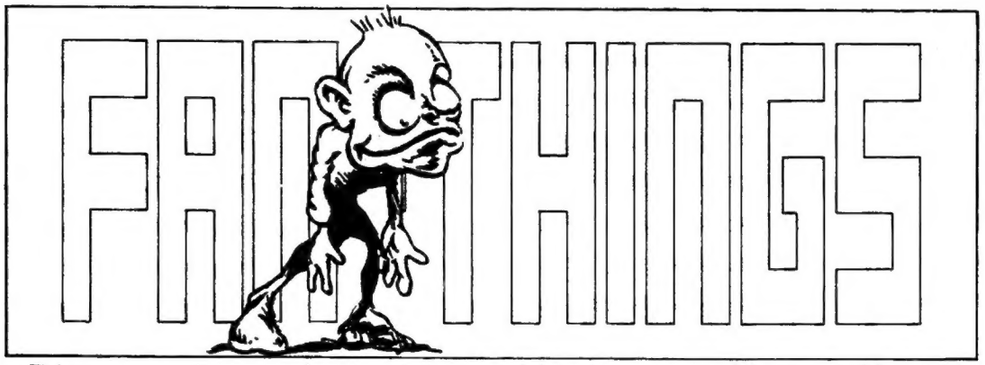
THE COMIC COMIC COLUMN



I was wondering how to start this column off; I could say "Welcome to what is hopefully to be a regular column", but let's just say this is to be about the comic weeklies. I use the word "comic" intentionally, as these weeklies, produced by D.C. Thomson and IPC, are intended for the under-twelves--don't let this put you off, some of the strips are very funny, and they're well worth the pennies you'll pay for them.

Let's start with one of D.C. Thomson's pair of long-running comics, BEANO and DANDY. At 5p, they are the cheapest comics around--in Dandy you get twenty pages packed with plenty of good strips --Dirty Dick, Korky the Cat, Desperate Dan, Black Bob, The Smasher to name but a few. Beano is my favourite comic, starring Dennis the Menace, with his pals Curly, Pie-face, and his dog Gnasher; this is the most hilarious strip in the comic, but you also have Roger the Dodger, Minnie the Minx, Ball Boy, Lord Snooty, & the immortal Bash Street Kids. If you haven't had a look at this comic for a while, I advise you to have another look.

Now for D.C. Thomson's rival, IPC; one of their newest comics is CHEEKY. At 8p for 32 pages, this is a very funny comic, with around 11 pages of Cheeky himself drawn by Frank McDiarmid. It also has the Skateboard Squad, Creepy Sleepy Tales, the Six Million Dollar Gran drawn by Ian Knox, "James Bold, Investigator of the Supernatural", Mustapha Million, and Space Family Robinson, plus more. For 8p it's well worth a look in. -JOE W. MATTHEWS



This year, we have coming up for us not just one summer-time two-day comics convention to look out for, or to look forward to--but two! First comes the main London two-day con, similar to last year but with Don McGregor flown in at great expense as Guest of Honour, and second is what Rob Barrow, who is organizing both events in a grand attempt to run off in two directions at once, calls COMICON II; it will be held in Birmingham, only two minutes from the main New Street station. Turn to Bem's centre-spread for lots more details of Rob's plans, including his new fanzine project, MAILZINE.

Now, most people will only be attending one such event--if you live in the north or midlands, unless you're an avid fan of Don McGregor, you may find the Birmingham event handier, and even some southerners may be tempted by the thought of a smaller event. The cost of admission may be the same, but with 40 instead of 100 dealers tables, it may be a less commercial, more friendly time. And I can spend all my cash at forty tables with no trouble!

A lot of fanzines have arrived in the last few weeks--and I couldn't be happier! Let's start with the weirdest one, which looks as if it was held up for 15 years by our valiant Post Office -- FANTASTIC 4 MAG ≠1, edited by sometime Bem contributor Richard Ashford.

It appears that the first four issues of FF have just come out, and the young fan that Richard was then has been inspired to start a fan magazine! The effect is hard to describe -- invest 2/-, plus postage, and find out for yourself! Er...in decimal currency, make that 17p.

PANELOLOGIST ≠9 is out at last, with 24 pages (8 of them ads) for 25p--and George Barnett minces no words about a shopkeeper and comics dealer who has dropped out of sight, it seems, without settling debts with numerous suppliers and Marvel (both UK and USA), or filling outstanding orders for comics! I gather now that he has come out of hiding enough to do a repeat of his "I'm going to sue you" rigmarole, though. Also of note, besides Kev Curran's fanzine review column, is a 2-page photo-feature on Comicon 77, with various big name fans in silly poses. The main scoop, though, was to get a photograph of Hunter Tremayne looking sensible! Well, fairly...

ELIPSE ≠2 is now out, at 35p by post from Phil Elliott,

if you've got the first issue, you'll need no further recommendation. For the rest of you, I'd better report that Tony "Litratrip" Schofield and House of Hammer/Swordspell new pro David Jackson have strips, plus such well-known fan artists as Nick Neocleous, Phil himself, and Bob Watkins. And there's more! 24 litho A4 pages (no ads) for 25p plus postage is fine value--I hope Phil, and Ian Wieczoreck, are able to continue publishing this excellent fanzine.

Good news for imported comics buyers; Bram Stokes, who has done more over the years to create comics fandom as we know it than any two other people, has brought down his price at "Dark They Were & Golden Eyed" for 35 cent comics to 25p, so dash along to 9-12, St Annes Court, Wardour Street, London W1! Of course, often the earliest one can get imports is at a Comic Mart, and our editor for one already uses that price...

WARK ≠11 30p from Rosemary Pardoe,

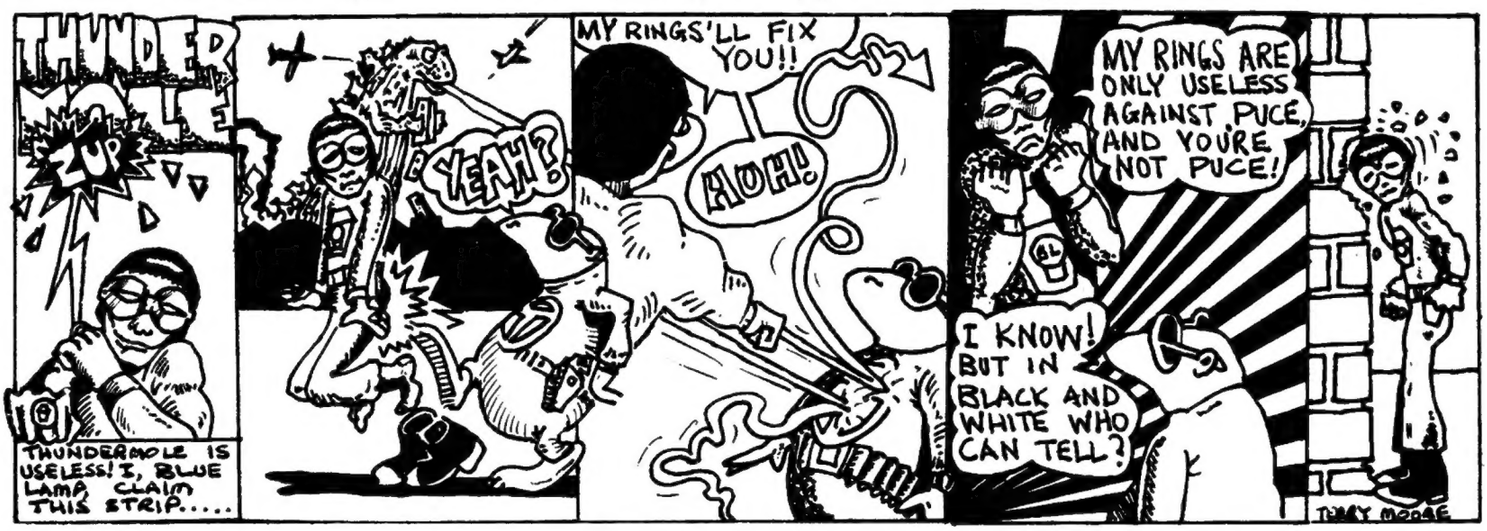
is well worth trying--it covers fantasy and comics fandoms, with Mike Grace on comics fanzines, plus other columns. It gives one a wider view of fandoms; at 20 A5 pages it may be expensive, but enjoyable.

APOCALYPSE ≠3 25p by post from Dave Hornsby,

is the best issue yet, with a wrap-around two-colour cover plus the 13-page "Origin of Apocalypse"--there are of course echoes of other strips, but the end result is a good story, well presented. Another good stripzine is ULTIMATE SCIENCE FICTION ≠3 16 A5 pages for 20p from Neil Bailey,

the Dobering saga moves 13000 years into the future in fine fettle. The feature's artist, Steve Dillon, is another promising storyteller--I look forward to seeing him get better and better. Alan Austin may be taking on the publishing chores soon; he should help improve the zine's frequency.

I gather The Society of Comics Enthusiasts is covered by Jonathan Rogers in the lettercol; well, Denis Gifford has set up in competition with a collectors club for fans of the British comic, "Association of Comics Enthusiasts". The subscription rate is £5 per annum--no doubt an S.A.E. will get you full details. If you liked the wide range of material in the late "Ally Sloper", this may well be the club you've been waiting for -- but Marvel fans would be more at home in T.S.O.C.E., whose club journal THE COMIC REVIEW has reached its third issue. The main feature is an 8-page Bob Watkins viking strip, along with some very cheap comics for sale.


THUNDERMOLE
ZUP
THUNDERMOLE IS USELESS! I, BLUE LAMA CLAIM THIS STRIP.....
YEAH?
MY RINGS'LL FIX YOU!!
HOH!
MY RINGS ARE ONLY USELESS AGAINST PUCE, AND YOU'RE NOT PUCE!
I KNOW! BUT IN BLACK AND WHITE WHO CAN TELL?
TIMMY MOORE

WORLDS-8 is, I'm glad to say, a great improvement on the previous issue; all it is missing is a price, but I imagine 15p would cover it from Mark Finch.

"Gerry Anderson Rules...OK?" is the main article, backed up by a 5-page Quack-type strip "Cat-Astrophe" by Brian Bonhomme, and the usual multi-media news & reviews service. A lot is fitted into 16 A5 pages--if your interest extends to films and SF, you'll find this a very useful little fanzine.

And talking of little fanzines, COMICS UNLIMITED has undergone yet another format change; CU ≠49 has 32 photo-reduced litho pages, in A5! That's 8½" x 6", half the previous CU size, but with the return to reduced type, there's actually more to read than usual. 19 pages of letters, plus of course Baragrin, a fine Neocleous back cover, and 8 pages assembled by ace looney Paul Jay -- an interesting package, yours for 25p from Alan Austin.

On the subject of the Comics Heroines Fan Club, THE HEROINE SPOTLIGHT (formerly The Heroine Addict) ≠12 was mailed out in mid February, and ≠13 is scheduled for a May release -- it will be a special Red Sonja issue, with Frank Thorne and Wendy Pini interviewed. The cost by sea mail is 60p, or by air £1--get in touch with M. Lock at Bem's editorial address, enclosing a 7p stamp, for CHFC details.

And for Dr Who fans, of course, there's the DR WHO APPRECIATION SOCIETY; for details send an S.A.E. to Jan Vincent-Rudzki, D.W. A.S.

Not only do they produce fanzines such as CELESTIAL TOYROOM (their newsletter), TARDIS, and COSMIC MASQUE (fiction) -- they also have annual conventions, and even a film-making division. If you're a serious fan of the good doctor, this is where you belong! The cost is a mere £1.50 per annum.

NOUMENON is a worthy production, as SF fanzines go--nice and open, with good art by Colin Wilson, and plenty of publishing news. By air it costs $12 for 12 issues, by sea $6.50, from Brian Thurogood.

Brian's willing to swap zines with comics fanzine editors.

Back to comics fanzines, and RAMROD ≠3 22p from Brian Bonhomme,

which has a 5-page duck strip written by Bem alumnus Jonn Hay & drawn by Martin Noone, a K. Williams article, a photo of Martin Lock (looking intelligent!), a strip by Brian Bonhomme & Bob Watkins, and various departments. It's a promising zine; the fan artist "introducing" series, on Bob Watkins this time, is a fine idea.

WAAAUGH ≠1 20p from Laurence Parrott,

has in its 20 A4 stencil pages articles by Williams and Lock, a prequel to his Bem-17 strip by Moore, and art by Matthews (Joe) and Superswipe -- it has a different approach from most comics fanzines, which can't be bad!

KATHOLICITY

The Wonder Woman Spectacular has seriously displeased me. No, it wasn't the ridiculous Amazon 'armour', though that was bad enough--surely the Amazon doctors know that a buttock wound, far from being funny, can cripple, and yet the only protection afforded their warriors in that area is a strip of cloth. Perhaps they're making sure they <u>daren't</u> turn away from the fight. And it wasn't the fearful jolly-hockey-sticks atmosphere of "Paradise" Isle--I don't like that either, but I'm used to it. What got up my nose was the treatment given to my favourite goddess. Now hear this: Pallas Athene, as well as her main function as the embodiment of Wisdom, was a war-goddess of very considerable skill and strength. The Greeks, perhaps, were suggesting that the truly wise learn self-defence just in case. She was physically strong, of superior intelligence, wore Hephaestus-forged armour, carried the Aegis, an invulnerable shield which in later days had Medusa's petrifying head attached to it, and was often allowed to use daddy's thunderbolts. (She was Zeus' first and favourite and much-indulged daughter.) What is more, she could, and <u>did</u>, beat Ares (or Mars, if you prefer) in a straight fight. (Homer says that; you will find it in the Iliad.) So why did she just stand by, wringing her hands, while Ares manhandled her ally? Why didn't she jump in and sort him out? She could have done it easily. Considering also her poor grammar, I have come to the conclusion that it wasn't really Athene at all--the real article had had to go and referee a boxing match in another time and dimension, and had left a disguised Amazon as a substitute. Her appearance at the said boxing match, as an absolutely fair judge, was more like the real Athene, as was her guest shot in Beowulf, where she was still taking care of her pet mortal, Odysseus.

Have you ever wondered why so few girls read comics once they get past a certain age? A young visitor left a 'Bunty' at our house the other day. Now I started off on that one myself, before deciding I preferred Superman. It was full of stories about boarding schools, orphans in World War II, ballet dancers, Victorian orphans, and girl trapeze artists, so you can see why the big S was preferable. And how is it now? Well, there's a story about a tough but lovable Cockney with a great talent for ballet dancing. Another about two World War II evacuees -- one is an orphan, the other's parents are in Ireland and for some inexplicable reason she does not go home. An anti-heroine, who is determined to ruin her boarding-school

because her former pupil mother was expelled after being detected cheating at lacrosse and never got over it. A Victorian orphan sent to live with her eccentric grandfather, who lives in The Old Dark House or a reasonable facsimile thereof. A tough but lovable Cockney with a great talent for tennis. A girl whose dog is for Death Row unless she gets him properly trained -- for some reason she hasn't thought of obedience school. A tough but lovable Queen (aha, got you there) of a place called Barovia, whose citizens and monarch use such typically Balkan terms as "Hoi!" and "Oo-er!" and "Urk". A bionic girl, who doesn't seem able to do more than run races with another bionic girl—an inferior one from a Foreign Power who rusts in the rain. And the Four Marys, who share a study at St Elmo's and were doing so when I last read the production, about twenty years ago. They <u>are</u> slow learners, although M. Simpson is a scholarship girl. M. Field and M. Cotter are of unknown parentage, but <u>Lady</u> M. Radleigh's dad was an earl. Despite this she was great friends with Simpson, whose parent was a shop assistant. Democracy in action. No trapeze artists, how odd. Now we all <u>know</u> why a lot of girls give up comics early.

And now for this issue's competition, based on Worlds Finest ≠250, pages 19 and 20. Part 1: Do you think it's a colouring error, or do you reckon she keeps her wig on? Part 2: How do you think they got it by the CCA? And as everyone who hasn't got WF ≠250 rushes to their bookshop/importer/whatever, I pocket my cheque from J. Kahn and walk off into the sunset. Actually, it's 9.30 in the morning, but breakfast table doesn't have the same sound. And actually I'm going to snip at "Bunty's Cut-Out Wardrobe"... -KATHLEEN GLANCY

Media ≠6 18p from Mark Ellis,

is out, a month behind ≠5; the lack of a cover logo suggests Mark isn't aiming for shop sales, but it's a useful adzine, and complements both Colin Campbell's FANTASY ADVERTISER 45p from him,

and Bem's FANTASY TRADER (5p in shops, free to Bem subscribers). F/A ≠64 should be out by now, with a Don McGregor article on Dragonflame, interviews, and more; FT 29 has a Neocleous cover, and "Opinionette" by Barry K. Winetrobe--plus ads of course! Buy all three, and miss nothing...

CREATION 25p from Joe Matthews,

is due soon -- features include M. Lock interviewing R. Lanihorne. And so I run out of space--au revoir! -ED SALLIS

COMICON 78

BLOOMSBURY CENTRE HOTEL, CORAM STREET, LONDON WC1

JULY 29/30. ADMISSION ONLY £2

•SPECIAL GUEST DON McGREGOR•

This year's Comicon will again be held at the Bloomsbury Centre Hotel, where we will take over the whole of the London Suite on the ground floor. The dealers room will be in the Montagu room, the film shows, talks, and auctions will be in the Park room, and we will be using the Trafalgar room for relaxation and refreshments. For the first time we will have a professional comics writer as the keynote speaker, Don McGregor, former Marvel writer on Killraven, Black Panther etc.

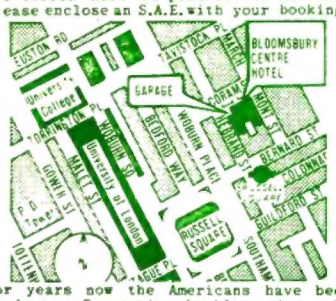
There will be nearly 100 dealers tables with over ½ million comics, portfolios, posters, fanzines, original artwork, and many other comics related items on sale from Britain's top comics dealers.

Over the two days of the Comicon there'll be art displays, auctions, talks, nine full length feature films, and many other events, all for just £2.00 for both days. For further details as they appear, send an S.A.E. to: COMICON 78 (UP-DATE)

DEALERS

Dealers tables are available at £15.00 each for a centre position (all wall tables have now been sold). The price covers both days and includes one free admission per table. All bookings should be sent to: COMICON 78 (TABLES)

All tables must be paid for in advance. Please enclose an S.A.E. with your booking.



For years now the Americans have been producing Convention booklets that make ours look pretty sick. Fans often ask why it is that the British Comicon booklet can't match its American counterparts in quality. The reason is simple. Lack of TIME and FUNDS on the part of the British organisers.

This year we plan to put an end to this deplorable situation. The 1978 Comicon booklet is being produced by Alan McKenzie and Paul Hudson, the people who brought you "The Artists Index". This leaves Rob Barrow and Colin Campbell free to worry about trivialities like booking the venue and arranging the film shows and guest lists.!

But, with the best will in the world we cannot produce a booklet to be proud of without finance.

We aim to make this year's booklet a collectors' item. Already we have a spectacular professional artists' portfolio lined up, with art by Bolland, Bolton, Gibbons, Neary and many, many more. And just to show we're not biased we also have specially drawn pieces by Kirby, Staton...but let us not bore you with our name dropping. We will be including a floor plan of the dealers room so that dealers can quote their table number(s) in their ad, enabling customers to go directly to the desired tables.

Since fan-editors often arrange to have an issue of their fanzine published to coincide with the Comicon, advertising is a 'must' for them, too. After all, how how can fans be expected to buy copies of their favourite fanzine if they don't know the current issue is available?

Advertising is the life-blood of the Con booklet. For every page of advertising we get we can give you one-two pages of editorial material. If we only get one page of advertising, YOU get a two page Con booklet! But if we get 100 pages of ads the booklet will have to be a three-volume set!!

IT'S UP TO YOU.....

ADVERTISEMENT RATES.

A full page A5 advert in black and white supplied same size will cost just £12.00, reductions are extra. For your £12.00 your advert will appear in both the London and Birmingham Con booklets and will be given free to around 1,500 attendees. Details of half page and colour adverts upon request. For all enquiries concerning the Convention Booklet advertising or editorial, please write to:

COMICON 78 (BOOKLET)
Alan McKenzie

Please enclose an S.A.E. with your enquires.

BIRMIN
comic

BIRMINGHAM CENTRE HOTE

FREE Saturd

STARTS 12 NOON

If you live in the midlands or the north of England and can't always make it to London for every mart then the Birmingham Comic Mart is the place to go. The Comic Mart is held in the Malvern Suite on the second floor where you will find all the latest imports and those hard to find back issues.

Come along on May 20th, we'll have over thirty tables stacked with nearly 100,000 comics, posters, portfolios, black and white magazines, fanzines and many other comics related items from Britain's top comics dealers. Doors open mid-day, see you there.

DEALERS

A limited number of both centre and wall positioned tables are available. Centre tables are £3.50, wall tables are £4.50. Send your booking to:

Rob Barrow,
Fantasy Domain

Please enclose an S.A.E. for confirmation

COMICBOOK

Lyndhurst Hall, Warde

FREE Saturday

The Comicbook Marketplace, now on a regular quarterly schedule, is not only the place to pick up all those hard to find back issues and latest imports but also somewhere where you can meet fellow fans and see old friends. If you hate marts that are vast and impersonal then the Comicbook Marketplace is for you.

Come along on June 10th, we'll have over thirty tables packed with nearly 100,000 comics, posters, portfolios, black and white magazines, fanzines and many other comics related items from Britain's top comics dealers. And when you've finished buying we will be showing a full length feature film in the small hall.

DEALERS

A limited number of both centre and wall positioned tables are available. Centre tables are £3.50, wall tables are £4.50. Send your booking to:

Rob Barrow,
Fantasy Domain,

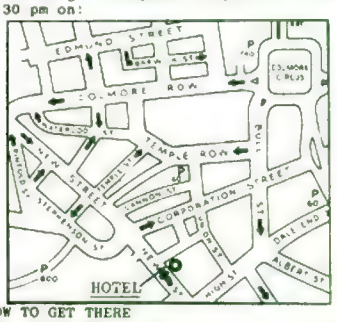
Please enclose an S.A.E. for confirmation of booking. Telephone enquiries after 7.30 pm on: 01-476 1810.

NGHAM MART

L, NEW STREET, BIRMINGHAM. 2.

ay MAY 20th

of booking. Telephone enquiries after 7.30 pm on:

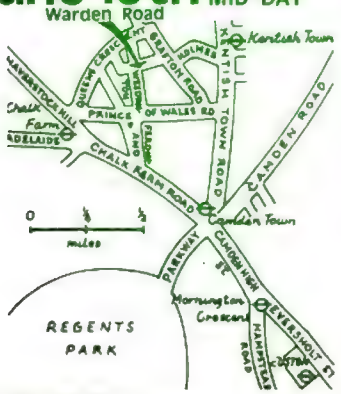


HOW TO GET THERE
The Birmingham Centre Hotel is situated right in the centre of town and is just a few minutes walk from New Street Railway station and the city's central bus depot. Cars can be parked in a number of multi-storey car parks near the hotel. These car parks are indicated on the map by the letter P.

MARKETPLACE

en Road, London, NW3

June 10th STARTS MID-DAY



HOW TO GET THERE
UNDERGROUND to Kentish Town, Chalk Farm, or Camden Town. BUS numbers 27, 134, 137, 214 to Kentish Town or 3, 27, 29, 31, 53, 68, 74, 253 to Chalk Farm or Camden town.

COMICON II

IMPERIAL HOTEL, TEMPLE STREET, BIRMINGHAM. B2.

SEPTEMBER 2nd/3rd ADMISSION ONLY £2.00

COMICON II is being held to celebrate ten years of British comic fan gatherings, the first of which was held in Birmingham over the first weekend in September back in 1968.

Our special guest will be the artist Paul Neary, who will be speaking on the artist and his work. There will also be at least nine full length feature films including 'Fritz The Cat' and 'Young Frankenstein'. Other events over the weekend of September 2nd/3rd will include talks, auctions, art displays and much, much more. All for just £2.00 for both days.

As we are trying to make Comicon II as much like the early Comic Conventions we will be keeping the attendance down to around 300 people so as to make it a more personal event. We will begin taking registrations at the May 20th Birmingham Comic Mart and from then on you will be able to register at Nostalgia and Comics 1 Hurst Street and 4-6 Hurst Street subway, Birmingham 5 or by post from:

COMICON II (Registrations)

Please enclose an S.A.E. with your registration. Please make all postal orders or cheques payable to Fantasy Domain.

DEALERS
A limited number of dealers tables are still available at £10.00 each, all tables are wall positions. The price covers both days and includes one free admission per table. All booking should be sent to

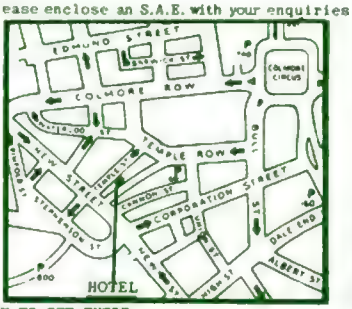
COMICON II (Tables)

Please enclose an S.A.E. with your table bookings. Please make all postal orders or cheques payable to Fantasy Domain.

CONVENTION BOOKLET
The Convention Booklet for Comicon II will be a special edition of the London Comicon booklet, so if you advertise in the Comicon 78 booklet your advert will automatically appear in the Birmingham edition, all for just £12.00 per page. If you wish to advertise, please write to:

COMICON 78 (Booklet)

Please enclose an S.A.E. with your enquiries.



HOW TO GET THERE
The Imperial Hotel is situated in Temple Street, just off New Street, in the centre of Birmingham and is just a few minutes walk from New Street Railway Station and the city's central bus depot. Cars can be parked in one of the many multi-storey car parks near the Hotel. These are indicated on the map by the letter P. If you live in London and want to attend, Inter-City trains run frequently between London and Birmingham and takes about 1¼ hours. An adult weekend return costs about £8-9. We may also be laying on a special coach that will leave London on Friday night and will return Sunday night, this will probably be cheaper than the train. If you are interested, drop us a line and we will send you details. Please enclose an S.A.E. with your enquiry.

WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN COMICS FANDOM?

Well, now you can with Mailzine. What is Mailzine? It is a newsletter that YOU can contribute to and distribute. It will appear about every six weeks and all it will cost you is a 7p stamp and a few minutes of your time every issue.

HOW DOES IT WORK? Simple, all you have to do is send us your name and address, we will put you in to one of the Mailzine groups. Now, if your name is top of the list, you will recieve, through the post, six copies of the Mailzine and a list of names and addresses; your name will be at the top of the list, just cross off your name, take your copy of the Mailzine and send the remaining copies on to the next person on the list. The last address on the list will be ours, if you want to contribute anything to the Mailzine you can send it to us via the other members of your group, either on a separate sheet of A4 paper or on the back of the Mailzine list. You can, of course, also write to the other people in your group who are ahead of you.

INTERESTED? Then send your name and address to: Rob Barrow

Please mark your envelope 'Mailzine'. Remember only send in your name and address if you are willing to send on the Mailzine to the next person on the list, if you don't you will let down the other members of your group.

It doesn't matter whether five people reply or 500, it can work no matter how few or how many reply, as long as the people that do join in remember to send off the Mailzine to the next member.

reaction

A colour cover is not something to be expected on the average fanzine, which made Bem-17 all the more welcome; it practically jumped out of the envelope. I imagine it must have had an appreciable effect on sales in the shops. Another one soon, maybe? The space given to straightforward news has, I see, been further cut down, this time 1½ pages out of about 20. Sure, other items had elements of news & information in them, but the general emphasis seems to be more on information & opinion articles. Good move, one would think; surely this sort of thing appeals to a wider range of people, especially with so many zines reporting identical news. Don't do away with the news column entirely, though.

When you cast a cursory glance over present-day comics, Rich Morrissey's comments ring only too true. The reasons seem fairly obvious. The older generation of writers and artists from the Golden Age had to create new characters and situations because there was nothing in the past to fall back on. /(Except a whole generation of pulp and cinema heroes.)/ Regarding the creators of the early sixties, in most cases they were not fans, so there was a large time-gap between their reading and their creating comics. Nowadays it is usual for somebody to graduate directly from reading to writing or drawing comics --obviously they feel more respect, and a greater debt and relationship to the past. They see no reason for next month's issue, which they produce, being any different from last month's one, which they read. Possibly they feel reluctant to alter old characters, or create new ones, out of some sort of awe towards their predecessors, so recently their heroes.

By some strange quirk of fate, "Sigh" dealt with a somewhat related subject. It occurred to me that the fact that the present staff of the major companies are ex-fans might explain the lack of communication. Ah, for the past! As more and more people seem to be thinking more and more frequently. Is there nothing good coming out of the present? Well, there is Howard the Duck which, despite popular opinion, seems to be coming gradually up out of its short (or perhaps not so short) slump, though it has still to get near to those first few issues. Gerber, along with McGregor and probably Englehart, comprise a third group of writers, apart from the creative and the analytical, which we may term the literary. These people do originate new ideas, but not a wealth of them, and they often are something to do with the past. They also have an ability to create believable new characters, often from unbelievable old ones, but that is not their true talent. Research, that is comics-research, plays little part in their technique. They rely on a high quality of writing; their strength lies in the treatment of situations rather than in the creating of them or the background behind them. For example, Gerber probes human emotions against a backcloth of his own invention that hangs suspended precariously between the grittily realistic and the macabre and wildly fantastical. McGregor is concerned, among other things, with the poetry he finds in life, to some extent in death, as well as, again, in the complexities of human relationships. Yes, the comic scene presents an overall depressing picture, but that only makes the good stuff stand out more clearly. Having recently sampled some current DC offerings, and as somebody who began collecting as a dedicated Marvel fan it jars a little to say this, I feel very keen to sample some more. There is some good material coming out now from Ms Kahn.

-Simon Booth.

So it's Bemtime again (didn't that odd guy on the Magic Roundabout have a catchphrase that went something like that?). Well, I could do with something to read while recovering from my rupture. It was induced by a laughing-fit of truly epic proportions that came on me when I was introduced to the 'Bionic Dog'. Place your bets for the species of Rudi Wells' next victim: Caterpillar, elephant, baboon, please tick one. How about a bionic duck? God! What a twisted imagination.

The colour cover hit me hard, like a heavyweight's K.O. special combined with a .45's butt on the back of the neck--oops! Sorry about that, I've got to get off that Raymond Chandler kick.

All interesting stuff inside, I thought, but maybe I'm easy to please. Sigh is my kind of column, while Katholicity alone is always worth the price of the zine.

However, of your LoC, Ms G, I must take exception to your Wolverine remarks. I find Wolfy a likeable, well mannered and original character, and that opinion has nothing to do with me being five feet four.

-Phil Emery.

Oh dear, what a pessimistic note in Fan-Things this time round -- I know 1977 wasn't a good year for fandom, everyone knows it, but this is 1978. And you know the old wive's tale that goes "Fanzines are never late, in a year that ends in eight." It could be true! How do I know it's an old wive's tale? Easy: I heard it from an old wife! /(There's the other old wive's tale that goes, "Fanzines will proliferate, in a year that ends in 8"--how do I know? I heard it from Nige Edwards!)/

Which reminds me, why not join an apa, some of you? I've heard of a great one (get in touch with Phillip Greenaway--his address is in Bem-17).

Ms K.G.--a word in your ear. Nice girls don't wallow in epistolary nostalgia. /(What do nice girls wallow in?)/ I'm getting worried about you, fancy admitting that you hate HTD! Ducks are sweet...especially when they're served à l'orange.

If all the comic scriptwriters are looking for something original, why don't they try making a normal hero/heroine? Someone without any emotional hang-ups, with a good relationship with the opposite sex, who acts like a rational human being. In the comic world that would be original -- a pity it wouldn't sell. /(I thought that that's what NOVA was supposed to be. Y'know, the guy that fails exams, isn't particularly brainy, and doesn't take to super-heroing like an orange-saucer to water. He gets involved in plots, but that is what the writer is paid for, non?)/

A note to Martin and Mike: be careful, too much amalgamating isn't good for your eyesight! /(Pardon?)/

The point of apas; in an apazine things can see print that a fanzine editor would not be interested in because, although they are of high quality, they are not comic and attached subjects orientated. Also, an apazine helps budding (and pro) writers develop their skills. And, for people like me who love writing letters, diaries and anything else, they bring the satisfaction of knowing you are achieving something with your writing hobby. Why don't you join us, Mike? You might enjoy it. /(Lack of time, m'dear; otherwise, I probably would. I sympathise with your compulsive writing syndrome (epistolmania?), but apas still seem a pointless compromise between a real fanzine and a clipped-together bunch of letters.)/

One piece of "art" (and I use the word loosely) that caught my eye in Bem-17 was contained in Katholicity--yes, I'm talking about Captain Scotnat and his magic caber. I had no idea he really existed! In case he feels like emigrating to more civilised parts, the flat under ours is empty...

I think I'd better close, there's a man in a white coat outside who wants me to hold his stethoscope. /(Muttering something about big breaths, I suppose?)/

However, I shall return.

-Maureen James, London

Bem-17 was the best Bem ever; a superb cover, with more pages inside -- I even liked the cover repros, this time I could see them!

Ms James asks why there are no fanzines run by ladies--why doesn't she start one herself? Mr C. French seemed to have exactly the opposite views I have. How the hell does he expect to find out anything, if everyone follows his advice and prints only fanzine names that he knows? For that matter, should Martin stop printing the comments on undistributed Warrens because I have never seen one? No!

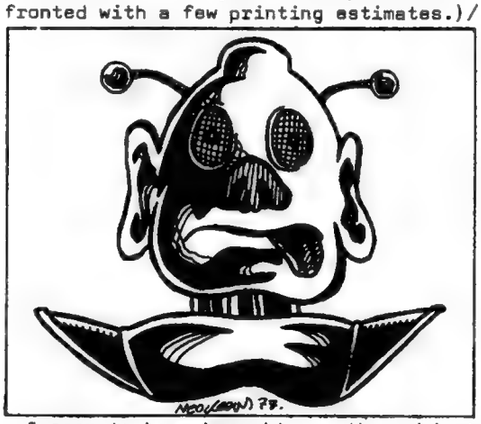
I must say that I liked Byrom's art--I wish I could draw like him! Mr Gold's comment that Bem has a fannish atmosphere even when it is 'slick' is absolutely true --even CMN doesn't have this!

-Miles Curtis, Lincoln

That was an excellent idea, incorporating an ad for 'Nostalgia & Comics' with the Bem front cover logo. I've loved Mike Higgs' stuff from the early days of 'the Cloak', but where can his work be seen regularly these days, eh? I hope that he continues to churn out ads for Nostalgia in any case. /(Mike has a syndicated paperstrip, "Moonbird", which is seen in most parts of England. Very pleasant stuff it is too, almost Nemo-like in style.)/ His drawing was only slightly marred by careless colour registration, but that's only a minor detail. /(Rumour has it that upon receiving that cover from the printer, Martin calmly rammed the plates up the man's left nostril. That'll teach him.)/

I liked the new look Bem, but what of Fantasy Trader? Maybe this is the first issue of the amalgamation, but far from Bem and FT marrying, Mike's zine seems to have been completely smothered. There aren't too many advertisers this time in FT, so it seems a bit lightweight in that regard. /(It was never intended that Bem/FT would be half Bem and half FT, with proportional involvement by Martin and I. I've pretty much tired of fanzine production--but a 7-year stint isn't bad, you must admit--so Martin takes care of that. My concern is principally the advertising, in the form of the FT supplement. I must apologise for the lack of adverts in it, but there isn't a lot I can do about it. People either advertise or they don't. I feel FT competes well with any other adzine, in that it's very regular and very cheap. C'mon, give it a try.)/

The point about zines not being professional productions, and therefore relying on an individual's enthusiasm... these things <u>are</u> understandable, but what tends to upset me is the fact that I have sent over 40 complete pages of generally very carefully, laboriously put together artwork to various zines in fandom, and to all intents I have had no satisfaction. That work, spanning two or three years, is lying in files somewhere, and I haven't even got proofs of it to show that I've actually done <u>anything</u> in that time. That is not too upsetting in itself, because most of my work has been encouragingly well received by such as Doug Gifford with Thing, Alan Matheson with Komix Plus, and yourself Martin. But what annoys me is the fact that Mal Burns publishes a page of mine in "Comix Index" and I have to wait until you tell me about it, and Ruan Lanihorne writes it up in Bem-17! As far as I can remember, I sent a single page of art called "Desktop Antix Comix" to Mal at Brainstorm about a year ago as a feeler to judge reaction, but I never even got an answer from that quarter. I wrote again later that year to see if the particular piece had even arrived safely. Again no reply. Now I understand that Mal has something called "Comix Index" on sale in the specialist shops with a page of my artwork included, and this package is selling at 75p a throw! What's this? Could it be the missing artwork? What kind of a production is it appearing in? How come I'm not even sent a complimentary copy of said zine, and will my art be returned? In other words, what the hell's the point in working my balls off, if I never see the result in print? It's hardly the thing to encourage an artist trying to establish himself, right? So I've written directly to Mal as suggested in the column, and I await the result. I'll let you know how I fare, but let's just say I'm a mite angry at my treatment! /(Inconsiderate and ignorant behaviour is as prevalent in fandom as in the big wide world, perhaps more so, though not as intentionally, because of all the pie-in-the-sky dreamers in fandom, who plan all sorts of wonderful productions -- only to wake up when confronted with a few printing estimates.)/



I seem to have brought up the subject of folios, and why they should be bought at all. I reckon the main reason that artists bring out these slick-paper items is an attempt to prove to themselves that they are not simply "mere" kiddy-komix artists churning out juvenile fodder without merit, but rather Artists, deserving of greater respect by art-loving adults. The folios are deliberately beyond the pockets of most comic buying kids (some of us adults have similar problems!); they are printed on the best possible paper for perfect reproduction, sometimes at the original size of execution, and they look so, so <u>respectable</u> on any bookshelf--not like those strangely-smelling boxes of kiddy-komix! Personally, I enjoy both the comix <u>and</u> the folio type of publication, for different reasons. The comic on the stand, generally in complete colour, is definitely the finished product, be it a form of art or simply throwaway entertainment, but the folios contain, if you like, working drawings towards that final, completed stage, be they pencil sketches or complete, original-size black ink drawings. I imagine some people buy them to prove to themselves that comics are as respectable as any of the already acceptable artforms. Amateur artists buy them to see what their favourite artists' work looks like just before it goes to print. Another reason is brought up in the letter from Ken Moore: "I notice a lot of really great artists like Kaluta and Wrightson only do covers... I miss Ploog, Wrightson and Kaluta, and really wish they would draw more interiors." Sometimes it seems that the only place to find work by your favourite artists is in the portfolios, or in the semi-underground comix or glossy magazines. The portfolios, I suppose, do partially fill the gaps, but I really am curious as to how many copies of say for instance "Satan's Tears" by Nino Colin Campbell manages to rid himself of. I find <u>that</u> really fascinating! /(Marvellous what a bit of provocation can produce. Excellent, well-thought answer, Harry, that's the sort of well-argued letter that really makes a lettercol.)/

-Harry McAvinchey.

As it is now an indisputable fact that Bem is Britain's greatest fanzine, I'll forget all the good things to be found in the last issue of this impeccable zine, and I'll write about something less interesting instead.

Firstly, I'll pick on Bem's answer to Wolverine or Hawkeye (the one you love to hate)--Mike Cruden. Mike, in your <u>seventh</u> interruption of my last letter you argued that although an editor has to listen to his readership when they demand a change, <u>he</u> was the one who decided the change's nature and/or direction. Although the editor of a comic may decide the direction in which it moves, the readers decide whether it stays in the place that it has moved to, and if they say "no" then the editor has to keep moving the comic until they say "yes". /(How many changes do you think a comic can be allowed, before the publisher decides it is wasting the time of the artists and writer. Two would be a usual, if not generous, maximum, I would think. Cast your mind over how many are cancelled without being given any second chances.)/

Much as I hate to say it though, Mike's interruptions proved a more interesting way to answer letters than usual, and I hope you keep them.

I sympathise with Ken Furbank's plea; being a T.S.O.C.E. member myself, I can't understand the apathy of fans today. I'd like a challenge to be issued to all non-members to tell their reasons for not joining. The meagre £2.40 certainly can't be the excuse, at the age of 14 with an income of sneezable-at size I managed that, when the cheap imports start I'll save more than that in a few months. But if Nige doesn't get a few more members soon, the Society could collapse--and that would set fandom back considerably. We all must have some ideas as to what the comics fandom scene should be like, as part of a <u>large</u> T.S.O.C.E. they could get their ideas put into action. We could have proper Comic Marts, rather than dealer-orientated rip-offs. There's very little a big T.S.O.C.E. <u>couldn't</u> do; and there's almost <u>nothing</u> a thirty-strong Society <u>can</u> do! (You can <u>tell</u> when I <u>start</u> getting <u>angry</u>, because I <u>underline</u> a <u>lot</u> of words.)

Whatever, please advise everyone to send £2.40 to Nigel Balloch.

. It's better value even than a Bem sub! /(What things, realistically, do you think T.S.O.C.E. could or should try to accomplish? What's a "proper" comic mart?)/

-Jonathan Rogers.

Bem seems to be improving in leaps and bounds, which doesn't surprise me in the least. I particularly enjoyed Fan-Things, and I think it deserves to be extended. After all, there's so much occurring in fandom at present that one page is a trifle inadequate to cover all of the news. Ed deserves a few more columns, surely?

The strips have progressed considerably --and the review section was really diverse this time around. Incidentally, are the reviews restricted to just comics, and related books? Or could it be possible to see some reviews of the many and varied SF magazines around? /(No--Bem's a comics fanzine. -ML)/ A few reviews of portfolios would also be appreciated, as most people order these through dealers, and so they have no idea whether their investments have been worthwhile or not until they receive their order in the post.

Glancing through 'Reaction', Maureen James mentions the 'reading comics in public' debate. I read comics in public: on buses, in trains...even in the street! I'm not in the least bit concerned about what other people may think. Despite the ridicule that I'm faced with in school for reading comics, I've noticed that these self-same people are only too eager to borrow and read my comics on long bus journeys. Perhaps there's hope for us and our hobby yet! After all, SF has been treated with a little more respect since the inception of the A-bomb, supposedly; maybe comics will some day merit the same treatment. /(As soon as the Negative Zone is discovered?)/

Finally, why has Nige Edwards adopted "M. Cruden" as a pseudonym? /(Actually, I adopted Nige Edwards as a pen-name some years ago, and have finally decided to abandon it.)/

-Phillip Greenaway.

The cover was delightful -- even though your printers could learn a little about registration! Katholicity reminded me that I still have an "Inferior 5" collection to complete, although I prefer "Not Brand Echh".

I see that Maureen has got a letter published (I bet it was the scented notepaper that did it!), and it's right next to mine -- sigh! I must admit that I find "The Human Fly" quite amusing -- but not good enough to buy! (I steal it from my brother!) And I cannot think of very many heroes with bits missing--okay, Cruden, I can see what they all have missing! By the way, has it occurred to anybody that the women have their sexual characteristics emphasized (e.g. big tits), but the men are asexual. Could this be what "Young Lust" etc were reacting against? /(This is what women's lib is all about, I suppose. It is somewhat insidious exploitation that all heroines have gorgeous bodies, and/or revealing costumes. They aren't people; they're titillating sales pullers. Marvel are the worst for this in the 4-colour field, with quite a lot of semi-nudity, but by far the worst offender is Warren, whose current policy seems to be at least one nude per story. Does it bother you that the aim, presumably, is to encourage adolescents to buy comics for a glimpse of tit or bum?)/

I disagree with Mike that Golden Age prices must fall before people start going in for more selective collections. I think that all it needs is for Marvel to continue with their non-progressive output and their heartless attitude towards British fans. /(It's more likely that the kids, without whom fandom wouldn't exist in any consequential form, will (are?) simply drift away.)/

I agree wholeheartedly with you about Atlas/Seaboard. I have a nigh complete collection of them, and I would say that about a quarter of them were good, and that includes "Destructor".

Mike certainly goes in for the controversial comment! The appeal of the APA is that it is small. Saying that it has no point is like saying "There is no point in talking to just a few people when, if what you are saying is interesting enough, it should be on radio -- and if not, keep your mouth shut"! An APA should be a small personal group who get to know each other through their zines. I regard my zine as a place where I can experiment; I can hardly see any fanzine editor producing

three pages of my work as a 7-coloured, silkscreened extravaganza, but if I wished I could do just that. An APAzine can reflect the idiosyncracies of its editor much more freely than a fanzine can, simply because it has a smaller audience and a near 100% feedback. /(If you are going to produce 20 copies of your zine, why not produce 100 or even 200. That generates a responsibility to include material that you'd feel 200 fans would find interesting—that doesn't necessitate pandering to a lowest common denominator, you can be choosy about the 200 fans you are going to appeal to. Sectors 1 & 2 were very much personality-zines. If a small ring of personal friends is your aim, why not operate a round-robin letter system, clipping the letters together, and discarding, or filing, them as necessary.)/

I do enjoy Simon Booth's letters, and I hope that we continue to see them in Bem. However, they remind me that whilst Bem seems to have gained from the amalgamation (i.e. Mike's controversial little voice in Reaction), I feel as though I have lost FT--that tatty little piece of paper was not worthy of the name! So to my mind I have "lost out" on the joining, but, no matter, it saves me money! /(Again, the aim is to give you a better package in Bem, via the ads, rather than losing FT completely.)/

Keep Alan Matheson's column, even if it has got an awful title. I found it useful and informative. I also enjoyed "Made In America", although I believe that all conventions are prey to the commercially minded, and will inevitably be degraded. /(Dealers are an economic necessity for most Cons, and partially the reason for attending, but a Con (as opposed to a Mart) needn't be inundated by dealers. How about a Con wherein the dealers are represented by a select few, chosen for specialising in a certain type of material at competitive prices?)/

Ruan's "Made In Britain" gives me a chance to sound off about the amalgamation of BATTLE and ACTION. I certainly feel "betrayed", as he puts it. I loathe and detest war stories, and most of the strips are just that. The spinball story should be called "THE spinball WARS" and most of the good ACTION strips were not carried over, although "Dredger" seems to have improved again after the initial setbacks. Surprisingly, BULLET, which was the D.C. Thomson answer to ACTION, has survived, and looks fairly healthy--possibly because it went in a different direction (concentrating on a single character--Fireball) at an early stage.

K. Williams served to underline my view that the only people who care about comic fans are comic fans. /(Except some fans-become-professionals, in whom familiarity has bred contempt, and a few others, who behave like nouveaux pros, breaking all ties.)/ And so saying, this comic fan will head for bed!/(Boing!)/

-Theo Clarke.

Hmm, still nothing from ol' Super-Sheep Edwards, in fact, wherever I look -- no Nige. Pity. /(I assume Nige, or me, or both is/are still heavily into caravans.)/

Rich Morrissey raises some interesting points -- Lee's stealing credit would explain Ditko quitting Marvel, and Kirby's reluctance to let anyone script his books. However, I don't agree about Englehart--the reason I enjoyed his Batman was because he made all the same characters fit in--he is the only one to capture the true feeling of the Batman et al in 20 years. /(But what about Denny & Neal, and the brief Goodwin period?)/

I agree with Martin's comment on Atlas --add to that list PLANET OF VAMPIRES (Great Broderick art); PHOENIX, with nice Amendola art, and the incredible "Dark Avenger" in PHOENIX #3 by Broderick; and IRONJAW, which had Adams covers and nice Marcos art.

I hope that we see more letters from Mike Gold--maybe even a column?

Please change the lettercol title -- Whispers of Insanity sounds much better. And how about some artists developing more interesting logos?

The current 'in' thing seems to be "we hate US comics". Sure, if you only look at the bad stuff, but there's still some prime material being produced. Many underground comics have worse art than the overground--Andy Johnson can't even draw a straight line (Art Attack Comix). And the writing is definitely an acquired taste -- but if you like it, OK! British comics are overprized, and most lack any characterization. However, they have produced some fine artists--Belardinelli, Bolton, McMahon, Gibson & Neary--however, this is a very small number compared to the U.S.A. -Marcus Boon.

Fan-Things: Ed Sallis seems more concerned with frequency than quality. I reckon I could produce a fanzine once a month -- hopeless, granted, but frequent all the same.

I agree very much with K. Williams in Sigh, but although he hardly defends comic reprints, he doesn't attack them vigorously enough either. If it were a much requested reprint, then why no 'blurb' on the cover? Why no reprint cover? Why go to the trouble of producing a new cover, if all "they" want to do is apologise for deadline missing. No, they've gone to too much trouble to convince the reader that it's what it wants. Last week's fish does not have a dissimilar odour. /(There are reprints, and reprints. The original idea behind Marvel Collectors' Item Classics, and Marvel Tales, was good. I know a number of people who wouldn't consider shelling out the £10,000 or so that it needs to complete their Spidey collection and are perfectly happy with the reprints. However, the triple D issues really are inexcusable, especially considering the frequency with which they occur. The collecting completists and subscribers must feel very ripped-off, and, as you say, in 9 times out of 10 there must be time to at least state on the cover that the story inside is a reprint.)/

-Bob Watkins.

I enjoyed Bem 17, and I feel it consisted of a better balance of articles this time around. I appreciate the larger cover reproductions, but why no Marvels, huh? The Black Widow's column (I don't fear Capt. Scotnat) this issue was immensely readable, but then it had to be to atone for her trite review last time. I too agree that the Inferior Five were great, although "Valhallaballoo" was never one of my favourites--I always enjoyed "Drainy Day" and "Darwin of the Apes". I only wish someone would explain why the book was entitled "The New Inferior Five" after issue six, I could never fathom the difference between the new and the old. While we're writing in for revivals, why don't you all write in to Marvel demanding a new Kraft/Perez Man-Wolf series? /(I always thought that strip was visually impressive, except for the Kida inks, but Kraft's stories seemed to be going round in circles. I wasn't sorry to see its demise. The whole concept was pretty rank, being mainly conceived to cash in on the short-lived horror craze; its cancellation allowed Perez to go on to better things.)/

I disagree with Keith Williams' views on the demise of the Teen Titans. I hated the puerile trash that appeared in the title over the last two years, but I always held out hope for a return to the supernatural/mystery stories of the type that were printed in issues 32-43, which to my mind were extremely fine comics. Unfortunately, DC seemed to feel that the Titans belonged to the kiddie market, and so maybe it's just as well the book has folded. /(The Titans were (was?) among DC's worst comics when it first started. It took Giordano, as editor, to make something of the book, attracting artists like Adams, Kane & Wood. I suspect Giordano had something to do with Cardy's dramatic improvement--after years of churning out trash, he suddenly started producing some wonderful stuff. Wonder what he's doing now. As you say, the later Titans were more supernatural than superhero, and I found them uncomfortably odd for that reason.)/

Rich Morrissey should be informed that Willow/Mantis was created by Englehart.

On to the letters section now, and the "would I read comics in public" debate. I do, even at work, where I am employed by a hardback book publisher (who published "The Best of Eagle" not too long ago).

Can someone put me in touch with Nigel Balloch, because I am interested in imports at 19p. And if my letter is published, you can print my full address. /(Sorry, no room. Oh, all right then--23 Dallin Rd, Bexley Heath, Kent.)/

Surely, Martin, you don't really need telling why everyone dislikes the Human Fly. It's because there is no thought put into the plot, the art is bad, and the characterization is awful. I read the first four issues, and for all the characterization and continuity, it could have been a different hero in each issue. I like this book even less than I liked Captain Britain, and we all know how bad

he was. Coming on to Nova 18, has anyone else noticed that since the news broke, that Nova was to go bi-monthly, Marv Wolfman seems to have done his utmost to see it stays that way, turning a fun book into something I now buy out of a sense of duty.

I was going to end with a few controversial statements, but I can't think of anything worse than the fact that Howard Chaykin's SCORPION is only comparable to Defenders 57 for boredom, and that Conan is becoming increasingly samey, everything Jack Kirby has done since returning to Marvel with the exception of the Eternals has been an insult to my intelligence, Don McGregor uses too much padding, and that the Silver Surfer is very over-rated, so I don't think I'll bother after all, and I'll only ask for Marvel to justify the waste of Chris Claremont on Ms Marvel. /(I'm glad you didn't end with anything controversial, 'cause I'd have probably felt obliged to answer/expand it.)/

-Frank Plowright.

I liked the cover of Bem-17, it was a neat idea and very eye-catching. Perhaps you could ask some more people to draw covers -- there are some good artists you could get, I'm sure.

I enclose some more art for possible printing. I don't know your exact policy about 'swipes', but personally I do not like them too much, as they are a bit too easy; I haven't included any for that reason. Perhaps you could raise the point yourself as to their worth? I myself have learnt to draw with them, and have done hundreds in my time. /(I always felt that 'swipes' had their uses; artistic training as you mention, and illustrating a particular character or artist's style. Apart from that, however, I always tried to use "original" fan art in Fantasy Trader.)/

I'm pleased Reaction is getting the space it deserves, it is probably the best part of the zine. However, I do wish you would print the full addresses of people, so that we can write between ourselves--on the other hand, maybe it is a deliberate ploy to make us write through Bem. /(The main reason is lack of space -- there are more letters than we can use as it is.)/

I think it is time you rearranged Bem again. At present it is too stable, and could become monotonous. Keep changing the articles. The best thing you have done in this direction so far is having the reviews written by anyone and everyone.

Lastly, I would like to ask why Captain Frog gets so much space, when the superior Thundermole receives so little. I hope you replace the late 'Stangroom' with something else soon.

-Rob MacGillivray.

Thanks for another vastly improved Bem; extra pages help a great deal, and you managed to fit in all your regulars neatly --although I would prefer to see some sort of main article each issue, and give some of the other regular writers a miss in turn. I'm not suggesting you drop any of the excellent review columns--Fan-Things, Made In Britain, etc -- but some of the others are getting too predictable, too regular. And you must agree, knowing what to expect spoils half the fun of reading a fanzine. /(Reaction, please? Would a chunky, in-depth article be appreciated, or are such articles simply over-long and boring? Should we rotate the features, instead of having every one every issue? And, gulp, which could be rotated with a minimum of heartache?)/

I wonder if Mike considers it's really worth continuing with FT. This first ad supplement was a bit of a let-down, compared with the pages of ads in previous FTs, but perhaps not much of a surprise, with MEDIA dominating as adzine. You can't hope to compete with it--ads are cheaper, higher circulation, monthly status and a cheaper cover price. The fact that both FT's outside ads were also in an issue of Media shows my point only too well; since Bem is still taking ads, why not drop it? You did an admirable job in Reaction--it seemed strange, though, to see Martin's letter being replied to in his own zine. /(I'll continue with FT indefinitely, even if it's just 4 pages of my ads. As for competing with Media, I'd have thought dealers would welcome as many outlets as possible, especially with Marts suffering drooping attendances, so it's really a case of peaceful co-existance. Re circulation, even though FT goes out mainly to Bem's subscribers, remember that it is mainly subbers who reply to adverts.)/

In reply to Sigh, if these writers and artists are ex-fans, then why should they be particularly bothered, since to them it's just a job, whereby a reprint here, no letters page there can be just got away with with just an occasional "Sorry".

-Gerard Kelly, York

SIGH

"Out With The New, In With The Old...?"

Oh dear... I do hate arguing with people --especially people I admire. But here I am, taking up the cudgels against Rich Morrissey again... Still, a fan's gotta do what a fan's gotta do... (or something)

Y'see, while I don't necessarily disagree with his basic premise (in Bem-17) about innovative writers and analytical writers, I do object strongly to his apparent dismissal of the latter approach; I don't (if you'll pardon the Kirbyism) think it's as important whether or not a character is original, or even new, as how well they're handled.

As Rich said in his piece, Englehart did create new characters in Count Crystal and Construct for his JLA stint, whereas he was merely making use of existing characters when he featured the Key, Snapper Carr, etc -- but which were better handled? The existing characters, no? (Anybody who says no does so at their own peril...) Originality isn't everything. The Geek was an original creation --Power Girl, Green Lantern, and come to that Howard the Duck (more on whom some time soon) weren't.

Plus, for me there are other factors. Rich, as I understand it, would prefer to see new villains in every ish (give or take) -- well, speaking as a continuity freak, I'd like to know what he reckons should happen to all the old villains? I mean, if you keep coming up with more and more new villains, who presumably appear just once and then are promptly consigned to jail for perpetuity, where the hell are the authorities supposed to find room for them all? And for that matter, even if no 'old' villains were to escape from jail any more, presumably some would eventually have to be released, having served their sentences. What about them? Although I suppose they could gradually be killed off. Hey, why not create a new psychopathic 'hero', along the lines of the Punisher, expressly for the purpose?

Also, I'd like to see the number of new characters kept down a bit anyway, because of the ever-present danger of saturating the market with more heroes (in their own mags, that is) than it will bear, bearing in mind that said market has dwindled dramatically over the years. Of course, I suppose one could compromise by having all new villains and all 'old' heroes...

But, most important of all, there is still plenty of potential left unplumbed in existing characters. Surely, when, and only when, there is nothing new or interesting left to be done with a character, should that character be finally and irrevocably laid to rest.

No...?

Changing the subject completely, I think the new format coming shortly from DC might just be on the right track--and not before time.

In Sigh #2, as you may or may not remember, I dismissed, for one reason or another, all of the then-current alternatives to the standard 35c - 32pg comics format, and declared my hope that the latter would continue, provided that the contents didn't shrink any further. I figured that, while 17 pages of story was just about adequate, to have less would be to make the proceedings just a mite too cramped. At that time the main alternative seemed to be the 60c - 48pg format, with 33/34 pages of story, and that to my mind was the opposite extreme. It seemed to me that having that much space would lead, almost inevitably, to superfluous interpolations and/or straightforward padding on the one hand, or attempts to squeeze a multi-part story into one issue on the other.

The new 50c - 40pg format, however, allows for 25 pages of story -- which, coincidentally, is about the page-count that was present when I first started collecting comics-- and, with a bit of luck, might just strike a happy medium. (Seems cruel to strike a medium when he's happy--but I digress) (persistently) This is in fact the sort of size I've been hoping and praying for -- but it's a little disconcerting to find one's prayers answered. I just hope there isn't some fatal snag I'm overlooking.

There is of course the obvious problem of expense; a couple of dozen titles a month at 50c (whatever that may convert to in sterling) is, needless to say, a trifle more of a strain on the pocket than a similar number at 35c...but I'll just have to try and reinforce my pocket, somehow.

But the main thing, as far as I'm concerned, is that this way we may not need to lose too many mags because of the switchover -- something that was worrying me greatly about a general move to 60c or $1.00 comics. Hopefully, there'll be room in the market for, for instance, a 50c FLASH and a 50c GREEN LANTERN, as opposed to a larger-size FLASH co-starring GL.

Of course, Marvel have yet to decide whether to adopt the same package. If they were to repeat their trick of a few years back and come out with a smaller, cheaper format linked with a better margin for the retailers, they could succeed in undermining the project--but I don't think it would be in their own best interest so to do. I certainly hope they don't, anyway.

Mind you, I dare say that after a while the 50c mags will start to shrink in content, like their predecessors--but then, let's cross that bridge when we come to it, okay?

Finally, before I leave the subject of formats, let me just say a brief word about the dollar-size mags: while I still wouldn't want all comics to go that size, on account of the expense, I must nevertheless say that, having tried them for a while, I like 'em.

'Nuff said?

-K. WILLIAMS

ANOTHER LOAD OF OLD REMARKS FROM THE EDITOR

Mike Cruden was mentioning that, when he was editing SECTOR, he gave letter-writers pieces of fan art he'd published --now, that's not something I personally would like to do, and some fan artists might not be too happy either, so what I thought we could offer people instead of a free copy of the issue of Bem their letter (or review, or art) appears in is a cover reproduction; they are, after all, quite handsome, and, when they arrive from the publisher, slightly larger than they appear on the actual comics! The next best thing, you might say, to original art.

All cover repros from this issue and Bem-17 are available, along with a few others there wasn't room for--so, if you are sending in art, reviews (the review deadline is April 22nd) or a letter for Reaction, and would prefer a cover repro to a free Bem if your contribution gets into print, enclose a 9p stamp and an indication of what type of cover repro you would prefer.

A reminder to non-subscribers -- while our advertising supplement FANTASY TRADER is once again on sale in some comics shops and at marts, Bem's subscribers get it FREE--and they get it FIRST, which can be important, as nothing's more frustrating for both fan and dealer than a returned cheque with "sorry, sold out". Since now Bem's art and articles are tending to spill over into FT, a Bem subscription is a better investment than ever! The rate? £1.50 for six issues, or 25p for one. And I should also remind anyone with comics to sell, a mart or a fanzine to plug, or anything else to tell us, they can reach all Bem's subscribers, plus casual shop purchasers, for 30p or so!

Well, this is another jam-packed issue of Bem, and even keeping to our policy of taking only a few ads space hasn't allowed us, once again, to include Sue Cruden's exposé of a Liverpool Mart. Sorry, Sue-- and, everyone, it's worth waiting for!

And I mustn't forget to mention that the CMN/Eagle Awards voting ballot is out in April; it's not geared to match Bem's publishing schedule, of course, so I'm not able to distribute copies...if you can't find one, send an S.A.E. to Richard Burton at 22 Woodhaw, Egham, Surrey TW20 9AP.

On the subject of space shortages, how does the idea of 4 more pages for 5 more pence grab you? It's certain the pages would fill up quickly! -Martin Lock

FANTASY TRADER: ADVERTISING INFO

Full Page (7½" x 11¼"): £2.00
Half Page (7½" x 5⅝"): £1.10
Quarter Page (3¾" x 5⅝"): 60p
Eighth Page (3¾" x 2⅞"): 30p

For your ad to print properly, your original must be in deep black ink. If typed, make sure your ribbon is fairly new; grey type will not reproduce. If written, don't use biro, use black felt tip. Photocopies are never black enough --always send originals. All pages are reduced by 33% for printing. As Mike's moving house, please send ads to:

Mike Cruden

Deadline for next issue is April 24th

REVIEW SECTION

ALL NEW COLLECTORS' EDITION #C-56
"Superman vs. Muhammad Ali" by Neal Adams, inked by Dick Giordano & Terry Austin, from a plot by Denny O'Neil

It's arrived--at last. And, happily, I can report that it's well worth the wait. Neal Adams hasn't lost his touch at all since he lost the ability to meet deadlines, as a glance at any of the 73 pages of story shows; even after reading the book a few times, it's still difficult to put it down without re-reading at least a few pages, or just absorbing the art.

Comparisons? The obvious one would be the Superman/Spider-Man team-up of a year or two ago, but O'Neil and Adams manage a far better plot than Gerry Conway's feeble confrontation between Superman and some parallel-world web-slinger, while Ross Andru's art, while conscientious, cannot compare with Adams on top form. In fact, for art, SF theme, and general importance, the closest thing to this book we've had was the Kree/Skrull war that climaxed in AVENGERS #97 -- but this is better.

So, I can highly recommend this book; both Superman and the (then-) heavyweight boxing champion are well portrayed, in character, and heroes of equal importance who surpass their normal limits, and for the cost of one Neal Adams back issue you get 73 double-size pages! I've one final thought, though--how can the forthcoming Superman movie top this? -Ruan Lanihorne

DEFENDERS #58 (April)
"Agents of Fortune" by Kraft, Hannigan, Janson & Green

The plots leave much to be desired, the scripting is a little contrived, but the break-neck pace of this book adequately makes up for it. Kraft doesn't let you stop for breath as he re-re-introduces Devil-Slayer, and beautifully ties in Buckler's original concepts at Atlas with Doc Strange's Eye of Agamotto into the harvesting of eyes needed for xenogenesis. The art is exciting: Hannigan's lost his major fault as of this issue -- his small panels. First Scorpio, then Sergei, now this -- talk about intensity. -Jim Pyman

SHOWCASE #99 (April)
Power Girl in "The Crater That Was Keystone City" by Paul Levitz, Joe Staton & Dick Giordano

Yes, well, a bit of a let-down actually. What with a mediocre villain and the inevitable secret identity for PG, not as good as I had expected. One thing that annoys me is the way Power Girl escaped from her prison bubble. Why should Brainwave -- who has, after all, got Flash and GL in captivity -- under-estimate her, I wonder? Just a ploy to end the story, I suppose.

Still, I'm looking forward to Power Girl #1, and if I was Mike Conroy I'd attach a string of asterixes so long...-J. Rogers

THE SPIDER-WOMAN #1 (April)
"...A Future Uncertain" by Marv Wolfman, Carmine Infantino, and Tony DeZuniga

If Wolfman succeeds with this book, with the massive handicap of its title (as he admits on the text page), he'll be the toast of Marvel. Much is explained in this issue, too much perhaps in Marv's attempt to put quality into the overworked concept and convince us this isn't MS MARVEL 2 out of SPIDEY, with a touch of NOVA, OMEGA, & CAPTAIN MARVEL.

The more I read Wolfman, the more I am convinced he's a one-book writer (TOMB OF DRACULA is still Marvel's best title). Carmine Infantino is always welcome, and easily recognizable here, despite the over-inking of DeZuniga. I hope this title succeeds, purely for its staff, but I doubt if it will... -Barry K. Winetrobe

This I do not see going anywhere--largely because I don't think they know what direction they're going in.

The blurb atop the cover reads: "To know her is to fear her!" Well, that's one possible direction, and it's a direction they take part of the time..and drop for the rest of the time. The text page speaks of S-W as a "stalker of evil", "grim and determined", "dark nemesis of the underworld", and so on. Well, that's another possible direction, of course--except for one slight detail. Jessica Drew (that's S-W when she's at home) just <u>doesn't</u> fit that description. She's confused, lonely, unhappy, insecure...she fights back like a cornered animal, not like a grim avenger. I suppose the idea might be that something will happen to <u>make</u> her that way; I don't know, and at this juncture I don't particularly care.

But then, I'm anti the strip on principle, because of the title. To my mind it makes no odds whether Spider-<u>Woman</u> is completely different from Spider-<u>Man</u> or not, the use of the name is straightforward cynical exploitation of the sort that Marvel used to castigate DC for. For that reason alone I'd like to see the book fail; the fact that I don't think it has got much going for it anyway is purely incidental. -K. Williams

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED #10 (May)
"The Eater of Souls" by David Michelinie, Giffen & Celardo

On the text page, David admits this come-back issue of Claw to be a fill-in, and that's just what it reads like.

The same old sword & sorcery elements that we see in Conan et al are all here, including the immortal wizards who want to use our hero to provide them with a little enjoyment by dying. And, of course, the naughty villains get their comeuppance by receiving the same fate they had planned for Claw.

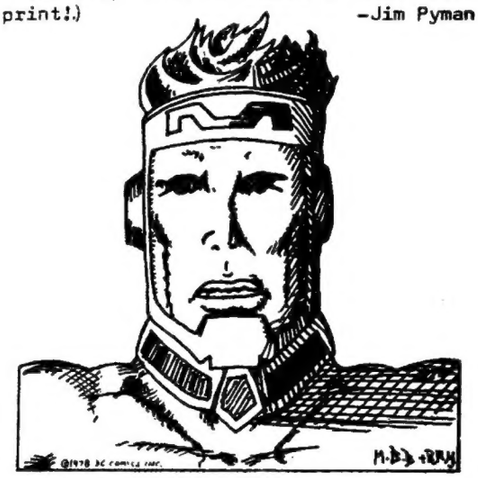
The only thing of interest this issue is the art, which in places is very much like Alex Nino's graphics. Other than that, this is a comic for sword-swingers only! -Jan Garczynski

COMIC MEDIA NEWS #34 (Jan-Feb)
34p from Richard Burton, 22 Woodhaw, Egham, Surrey TW20 9AP; four for £1.30

The fanzine I derive most enjoyment from, mainly because I'm a news fiend; I devour it instantaneously, and carry it around in my head forever. Most interesting is the Jim Shooter letter in answer to Englehart's slagging of Conway last ish--the plot sickens. Who do you think is honest, Shooter & Conway or Englehart? Whoever's right, I'll be sorry, because it'll mean someone's lying. Good cover repros (I thrive on them, too!), and a Mike Higgs wrap-around cover--but I prefer the blue on covers to this garish red.

Well worth 30p of anybody's dough.

(Christ, I'll be amazed if this sees print!) -Jim Pyman



STAR WARS WEEKLY #1 (February 8th)
"Star Wars" by Thomas & Chaykin (8pp), "The Forest For the Trees" by Bruce Jones & Alcazar (first 7 pages)

Why was this book still 10p for only 28 pages? The other weeklies are 36. Another complaint is that the artwork was pretty scratchy, especially on Darth Vader, for some reason. It was a nice book, though, its pages brimming over with offers and articles, including an ad for a STAR WARS FAN CLUB -- a bit steep at £2.95!

There was an averagely written SF story by Bruce Jones in the back, with excellent art by Vicente Alcazar; I would think, however, that this type of mature story, no matter how good, might drive younger readers away. -A.J. Mabbott

LAFF-A-LYMPICS #2 (April)
"Trouble At The Track Meet" by Mark Evanier, Owen Fitzgerald & Scott Shaw

Yet another masterful issue, as Rog Rankle, hard-hitting reporter, threatens to ruin the teams' morale. Yogi turns the tables in the last five pages, however.

Innovative breakdowns, intense characterisation, and the quest for survival in the cruel world of sport -- Marvel's most adult book, this. -Jim Pyman

MACHINE MAN #1 (April)
"Machine Man" by Kirby & Royer

OH my gawd, he's AT it again. WHY must Kirby pick OUT words apparently AT random TO put INTO heavy lettering? Okay, all mags stress given words in the dialogue, but normally in the sort of places you might expect... Things like "YOU!", "NO!", "You stupid FOOL!", "Do you know what you've DONE?", etc. Not generally with words like "WITHOUT", "OFF", "DOESN'T", and so forth. However...

As to the mag itself, well, let's just say I'm not altogether happy with it. The basic notion ISN'T, er, I mean isn't bad; nor is it original. The execution leaves a lot to be desired--but it could be worse.

The thing that irks me though is that, just as with Kanigher's Metal Men, Kirby's Recorder, and virtually all the robot characters I can remember, Machy (?) thinks and reacts like a human, and not a robot. But, you may say, surely that's the point in this case; the character's called Machine Man because he is man as well as machine. Well, maybe so, but I'd still like just once to see a robot that actually acted & reacted like a robot. About the nearest I've 'seen' was the computer part of Deathlok, though that wasn't quite the sort of thing I meant.

I mean, I don't know about you, but to me the idea of a robot spouting phrases like: "Getting a 'no-prize' for good guessing isn't my idea of amusement" jars more than a little. It's hard enough to try and imagine people using some of Jack Kirby's dialogue, let alone robots.

And yet, having said all that, I shall still be following the strip with interest to see what Kirby's got in mind -- which, after all, is more than I can say for some mags. -K. Williams

Admittedly I bought this book just to insult it (stupid thing to do, eh?), but actually it isn't all that bad. It's standard Kirby fare, but that doesn't automatically make it trash. To be sure it's as slow-moving and cliché-ridden as I expected, but if you can stomach it, you should quite enjoy it. The imagination alone makes it worth it, almost. -JR

And the land of Marveldom Assembled was ruled by Stan, called the Smiling One, and he did punish his people by sending unto them the eleventh plague, Kirby. And Kirby came and tore down the glories of Englehart and of McGregor, and he did build horrors and call them CAPTAIN AMERICA, and BLACK PANTHER. And they begat THE ETERNALS and 2001, and fear and dread (and apathy) was upon the land. So, the people arose and prayed unto Stan, "Release us from these Koncepts!" And Smiley took pity on them, and struck down Kirby's works. But, Lo! Stan did harden his heart, and unleashed two new plagues, and they were called DEVIL DINOSAUR and MACHINE MAN. And there was much weeping and waiting and gnashing of teeth, and a mighty exodus to the land of DC. -Barry K. Winetrobe

SUPERMAN #322 (April)
"Laser War Over Metropolis" by Martin Pasko, Curt Swan & Frank Chiaramonte

Thank God! At last we have the answer to the sixty-million dollar question, "Will Superman Defeat the Parasite Before He Dies of Boredom?" Anyway, Supes is alive, well, and living in Metropolis; at only three-quarter strength he manages to push the Earth out of the way of a laser beam, recover a billion dollars, catch the Parasite, and make friends with Solomon Grundy, all in one issue! -Jonathan Rogers

DEVIL DINOSAUR #1 (April)
"Devil Dinosaur and Moon-Boy"
by Jack Kirby & Mike Royer

When I read on the splash page "Stan Lee Presents: A tempest-Tossed Tale Out of Time", I gave up on this title. If you like the modern-day art of Kirby, you should get this for pages two and three, but if you're a normal sane person, then you might at least give the title a chance -- it isn't as bad as some of the stuff Kirby has done recently, like so many of Kirby's ideas it's brilliant, but now all I can do is sit and watch it ruined. I read Rich Morrissey's last column just a few days before I read this -- strangely prophetic it turned out. -Jonathan Rogers

SOJOURN #2
Published & edited by Joe Kubert & Ivan Snyder. Tabloid. $1.50

Hmmm, interesting item this--a tabloid comic, with some colour pages, featuring some of the best graphic artists around. Kubert's idea is like Mike Friedrich's: get away from the commercial fodder for a while, and let the artists draw and write what they want to. Good idea, though unlike Star * Reach, it doesn't really work here.

For starters, there's Joe's own TOR for 2 pages, with some brilliant Kubert art, but a very basic story-line. T.C. MARS, VERY PRIVATE EYE by Sergio Aragones is in the man's best tradition, with a continuing story. THE SMOOTH, by Mary Skrenes & Dick Giordano, is perhaps the best strip, because it has the most promise. A futuristic Red Sonja, who knows how to look after herself -- 3 pages doesn't give the strip much room to move, but I liked it anyway.

EDDIE RACE is by Doug Wildey, and is just another detective story, nothing more --also disappointing is EAGLE by John Severin, which is the story of a group of Indians and their leader. It's the west as visualised by Hollywood, and not the more realistic west portrayed in JONAH HEX and SCALPHUNTER, so it's rather phoney.

KRONOS by Lee Elias is perhaps the worst of the whole bunch. It centres around a war veteran (another one?), who's just had a fight with a bunch of goons and killed one of them, thereby reminding himself of his war days. Not bad, I suppose, but the writing has no flair or punch to it, and the art is just stagnant in black & white.

There's also a series of posters by Steve Bissette, whose style is very similar to his teacher, Joe Kubert--they're nice, though, and suitable for hanging up.

Joe promises to have an issue out every month; me, I don't see the point. -JG

MAN FROM ATLANTIS #3 (April)
"Showdown in Seatopia" by Bill Mantlo, Frank Robbins & Frank Springer

Nobody seemed to bother to write about the dollar issue, since the letters page is given up to a typically bad Devil Dinosaur ad. Marvel are losing all the credibility they were once renowned for; now that the TV series has been taken off the air, maybe the comic will die, too. A nice Weiss cover -- pity about the rest of the pages. -Jim Pyman

THE BATMAN FAMILY #17 (May)
"Scars" by Conway & Aparo (23pp),
"Horoscopes of Crime" by Rozakis, Heck, Wiacek & Colletta (21pp), and
"There's A Demon Born Every Minute" by Rozakis & Golden

Well, my first reaction to the first dollar issue of BatFam was "Why did they bother?" The dollar format seems to be wasted--wouldn't the Batman/Robin story be equally at home, with a little trimming, in BATMAN? The only improvement I can see is that Man-Bat gets more space.

Turning the Kaluta cover and, ignoring the inane verse that goes with it, the moody Starlin splash, we come to the Batman/Robin story, which serves as (A) a vehicle (ouch!) to bring The Huntress to Earth-1 (but how did the Justice Leaguer on duty react when an unidentified lady materialised in the satellite?), and (B) an attempt at a new twist on the disfigurement/revenge shtick. Plot line A works competently enough, and takes up a quarter of the pages--the remainder is a waste of space, if you don't guess the "twist" ending, then you're probably asleep.

The second tale brings together Batgirl, the Huntress and Batwoman, to battle Catwoman, Poison Ivy and the suitably mysterious Madame Zodiac. We're informed that the three villainesses share the birthday of March 14th -- remember that, there may be a trivia quiz later. Batgirl and the Huntress each get a chapter battling Ivy and Catwoman respectively, the latter working better, relatively speaking. The Batgirl chapter also brings back Senator Thomas Cleary. And now the good news; the final section features a battle to please all us Heroine Addicts. We're also promised a return by Madame Zodiac soon... could we have a rematch with our three heroines, please? The one drawback to the story is some singularly bad art.

Which leaves the Man-Bat tale, centred on the maternity hospital where Francine Langstrom is about to give birth--you've guessed it, it's the "menace surrounding the birth" plot again, featuring Morgaine Le Fey, released by the Huntress teleporting -- this nice bit of continuity is one redeeming feature of this formal--and the Demon. Now, as a long-time Demon hater I looked forward to this with trepidation, but he fits into this story excellently; Etrigan, a demon who takes human form, teaming well with Kirk Langstrom, who changes into a monstrous form to fight crime (a cop comments "Whatever happened to heroes who look like heroes?"). The menace is depicted so well that new life is breathed into the old plot, besides leaving an interesting possibility for a future story. Golden's art conjures up suitable imagery and, call me a softie if you like, but on reaching the last page I smiled. -Robin A! Webster

TALE-ENDERS

I've left typing up this page until the end, to allow myself more time to read the latest shipment of comics -- so don't be surprised if one or two other topics come up, besides comics reviews! At least I won't try and sneak an editorial into the last few paragraphs this time, as the non-arrival of Alan Matheson's column gave me room for one on page 16.

SUPERBOY AND THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES ≠238 is the no ads reprint issue, with all 46 pages of ADVENTURE ≠359 and ≠360 by Jim Shooter, Curt Swan & George Klein wrapped up in a new Starlin wraparound cover. ≠239, whose clichéd Mike Grell cover is in Bem-17 (in one of the 2 boxes Mike Higgs kindly left blank on the front cover, to be exact), is even more vital for Starlin fans, as "Murder Most Foul", the 34-page story, has plot and layouts by Jim, with dialogue (and plot assist) by Paul Levitz, and finished art by Josef Rubinstein. For a change, Ultra Boy is the star--and, when you start reading and see that he's entering a rather seedy hotel, and visiting a prostitute, you know

that this isn't your ordinary, everyday LSH yarn! It's a good, different issue, with for the most part fine art. Watch out for a copy--it's a May cover-date.

HOUSE OF MYSTERY ≠258, a ⊠1.00 issue, has a Ditko-drawn 6-pager, and a truly weird western tale drawn by Buckler & McLeod, "Showdown With Death". I think I'll be sad to lose HoM as an 80-page mystery anthology -- though a big, fat ADVENTURE will be nice! Wasn't there room for both on the schedules?

Talking of schedules, a talk with the brains of Comic Media Distribution has yielded the details of which 15 Marvel titles we can expect to be imported for the next few months. There are 8 steady monthlies: MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, CAPTAIN AMERICA, HUMAN FLY, MASTER OF KUNG FU, THOR, AVENGERS, INVADERS, and MARVEL TEAM-UP. HOWARD THE DUCK stops after ≠26 (July), replaced by SPIDER-WOMAN; IRON MAN stops after ≠111 (June), and is replaced by MARVEL SUPERHEROES 72 in July, and then the monthly X-MEN from August on. MS MARVEL goes bimonthly after June (≠18), giving room for NOVA from July (≠20). The May bimonthlies, CAPTAIN MARVEL, DAREDEVIL, RED SONJA,

& BLACK PANTHER, continue to come over, while the June POWER MAN, MARVEL PREMIERE and DR STRANGE are joined in August by MARVEL TRIPLE ACTION, since X-Men has become a monthly. That's the state of play at the moment --but it could be changed any time! There'll be plenty of copies of NOVA 20 around as imports, by the way, as when the dealers had to order, it was scheduled not to be distributed.

But back to DC, and indeed the comic they got the initials from -- DETECTIVE COMICS ≠477 has a frame of just over 3 pages by Len Wein, Marshall Rogers & Dick Giordano, around "The House That Haunted Batman" by Wein, Marv Wolfman, Neal Adams & Giordano from ≠408--it's a good chance to pick up an otherwise expensive story.

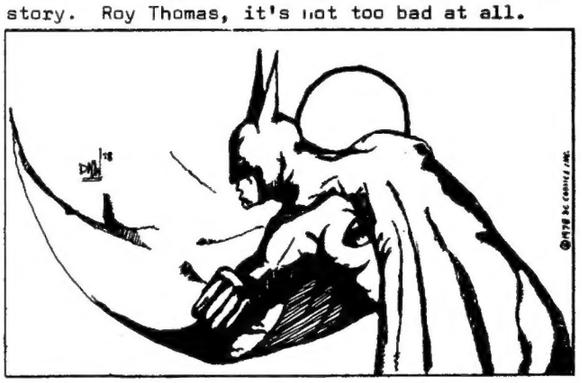
60 stars in 34 pages? That is the boast of SHOWCASE ≠100, and they even provide a checklist to prove it. Some heroes are only in the back of a single panel, like Sergeant Rock and Manhunter 2070; others, like Angel (Angel and the Ape) O'Day and Lois Lane, play vital parts. The whole idea is a touch ludicrous -- but Kupperberg & Levitz, and most notably Joe Staton, manage to carry it off.

CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN ≠86 is the penultimate issue -- and I get the feeling that Gerry Conway, Keith Giffen & John Celardo knew the book hadn't long to live. Bringing not only Swamp Thing and Deadman, but also Rip Hunter, into the book is self-indulgence; and the art, while inventive, stylish and dramatic, is not the commercial type of work, the stuff that sells. Okay, I did enjoy it--but wouldn't an attempt to make a package that would sell well enough to earn the title a reprieve have been an even better way to use this issue?

The 1978 FLASH SPECTACULAR is a nice item: including frontispiece, 64 pages of story, with a Kid Flash segment inked by Wally Wood, and a Golden-Age Flash 12-pager inked by Murphy Anderson. In it, we find Jay Garrick revealing his alter-ego to Earth-II, and Wally West letting his parents in, finally, on his secret. Back from comic-book limbo comes Johnny Quick --not used well, but, heck, it's good to see him in action. And we witness the death of Grodd--or do we? Even the ghost of a super-gorilla can cause trouble, we find! Flash's very first foe is also on hand--all in all, this is a very special special issue, and all credit to Cary Bates, Irv Novick, and the rest.

Carmine Infantino may not be drawing Flash these days--but a look at NOVA ≠19 might make you think he was! Check out panel 6 on page 10 in particular...

HUMAN FLY ≠9 (a close check on page 1 reveals it's the May issue) concludes the guest-shot by the White Tiger; at least 2-part stories may stop people from saying no two issues of this book have been at all consistent! TARZAN ≠12, yet another Young Tarzan fill-in, must have been Dave Kraft's try-out for the book--assisted by John Buscema & Rudy Messina, plus editor Roy Thomas, it's not too bad at all.



JOHN CARTER ≠11 is also out of sequence -- it's a special issue, "The Story Of Dejah Thoris", pencilled by Dave Cockrum, with Marv Wolfman and Rudy Nebres on the typing and inking chores. Nice... And STAR WARS ≠11 has Archie Goodwin, Carmine Infantino, & Terry Austin as creators, and the return of Luke and the Princess -- do you remember them? Somehow, Marvel have cleared out quite a few advertising pages (plus the lettercol--but such pages seem to be going out of fashion at Marvel), and put in SEVEN pages of house ads, for EIGHTEEN different titles. Darn cunning, yes? From STAR WARS fans into Marvelites in one easy lesson.

MASTER OF KUNG FU ≠64 is by Edelman, Zeck, & The Tribe, an out-of-sequence fill-in, features a fine Gulacy cover; and have you seen WHAT IF ≠8? After the Daredevil 25-pager comes a piece of insanity by Scott Shaw, "What If the Spider Had Been Bitten By a Radioactive Human"; eight weird pages!

DOCTOR STRANGE ≠29, by Stern, Sutton & Chan, guest-stars Nighthawk, with a Frank Brunner cover; but, to end on an up note, BLACK PANTHER ≠9 presents "The Black Musketeers"...there, I <u>knew</u> that would make you happy. And there's a nice big ad for HTD instead of a lettercol, just to show how much Marvel care for our well-being. Come to think of it, a reminder of one of Marvel's better mags is rather useful, halfway through one of Jolly Jack's tales. -MARTIN LOCK

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A VISIT TO THE MARVEL BULLPEN

This story is a mixture of past and present. Actually, time is irrelevant; the Marvel Bullpen is located on the fringes of the Twilight Zone. It is both a beehive of activity and a place whose setting is contemporary haphazardness. Visitors, once clear of those "hallowed halls", ask the same question: "How do they get anything done in there?

The earlier offices had a narrow door, painted green. On it was a large figure of the Hulk, menacingly growling via balloon, "KEEP OUT!" In those pre-1973 days, the bullpen was vest pocket size. Today, a walnut coloured double door has small letters reading "Marvel Comics Group", in the building which also houses its parent company, Cadence Industries. One cannot just walk in anymore. A receptionist presses a button so that a second door clicks open; and you find yourself on the threshold of the "Stan Lee Kingdom", which is usually sans Stan Lee. Across the hall lies what is affectionately called the freelance department, but, like everything else, it means nothing. I have seen people dozing on the floor in there beneath a large cut-out of The Mighty Thor which has used as a display piece for several Comic Art Cons. Comic books scattered all over the floor was the norm, and once in a while the then chief editor, Roy Thomas, would find himself a corner niche when he wanted some peace and quiet to compose an extra page or two for a story that had to be longer than originally contemplated. Back in the main area, as you pass various offices ranging in size from small to smaller, a left turn and then another left at the end of the runway would lead you to the two main bullpen sections. One has desks for the staff writers, the other has drafting tables for the house artists. Both rooms, however, are used only for patchwork, revisions, and the like; most work is done at home. The walls are all tattooed with pinholes, evidence of the mounting of past covers, notices, obscene drawings, and caricatures. Bullpenners take delight in drawing nude likenesses of the Wasp, Shanna, Spider-Man, and others. Equally well done are caricatures of the editors; particularly adept at this is Paty Grier, who has done ones of Stan Lee sitting on Mr Fantastic's lap surrounded by cobra-like arms, and a pregnant Sue Storm blaming Mike Esposito for her delicate condition. In the rear of this art workshop is a glass-panelled room, running the entire width of the wing. This was the mome of the late John Verpoorten, a giant of a man in size and heart. The few times I was there when he let out a bellowing roar, I noticed that immediate and complete silence followed; his size was not to be challenged. On the cork bulletin board in this production room may be from 60 to 100 cover repros of the following month or two's schedule. I once counted 85 for one month--knowing Marvel as most of you do, you won't be surprised to learn that half of them were reprints. Marvel is famous for stretching a story as far as it will go in the succeeding decades -- I know of two Spider-Man tales that have so far been printed six times!

The comic book industry is a transient one. You need a scorecard to learn who is working for whom that week, since people jump from Marvel to DC and back with gay abandon. They will also visit each other's offices without any fear of being attacked as an industrial spy, and in fact trade DC and Marvel comics in open auction. At one time it was an industry policy not to hire an artist or writer unless he lived within commuting distance of the publisher's offices. That has since changed, allowing talent such as my good friend Don Newton to do some splendid work for DC. As an art teacher for the Phoenix, Arizona school

system, drawing for comics is only a part time thing, and he could not give up the tenure he has accrued as a teacher to move East on the chance that a guarantee of a minimum number of pages per month would result in a decent income--not with a ten year old son to care for. Also, a mass migration to the California area created an artist and writers "ghetto" with Jack Kirby, erstwhile chief editor Roy Thomas, Mike Friedrich and others now sending in their stuff by mail. Those fandom graduates who do move into the New York area need quiet to create. They have no set hours. They know only that one fearsome word... DEADLINE. They will not get rich, and they are aware that the supply & demand marketplace is currently tilted strenuously in favour of the supply aspect. Lucky for them that the uniform of their trade is crude attire and simple living habits--they couldn't afford more. It takes years to earn the top rate of $35 to $50 per page (£18 to £26, at the current exchange rate). The bullpen is thus a dumping-off place; they leave their work, pick up the next assignment or two, receive a cheque, catch up on the gossip, and perhaps go into a rap session with the editor on the future plotting or direction for the title or character they're currently handling.

One room holds only merchandise; another contains photocopying and photostating equipment. And then there are the storage areas for the new titles that come in from the printer, plus shelves that hold past issues. In a locked room are the "big" issues, the first dozen or so of each title. They are kept for reference so that a writer can use the arch-villain that fought Dr Strange in his sixth go-round to battle Daredevil two months hence. What with the success of Spider-Man and Hulk on American TV, the cartoon series of all main characters, the exploding merchandising business, the syndicated newspaper Howard the Duck and Spider-Man strips, etc, Stan Lee is keeping his figurehead status in high planes. He still does the "Soapbox" for the editor's page on the run, but rarely checks every story personally any more. To find him in the bullpen, as I have said earlier, is unusual. You are more apt to run into his brother Larry Lieber (didn't you know that that's Stan's real surname?) supervising the British Marvel line, or Johnny Romita checking out art details whilst penning the web-head's newspaper serial. If you do happen to spot an older, smoother moving gent dressed in suit, shirt and tie, it is probably the likes of Carmine Infantino or Gil Kane making a rare visit. Both are uncomfortable amid the Marvel brand of office decorum and pace. They spent many years at DC, where the atmosphere is sterile, and each group has a separate room to work in by twos and threes. Often the quietness at DC is nervewracking, but necessary since at that publisher most of the creating and executing of ideas is done "in house" and not at home.

A parting word about the attitudes of the younger professionals. Most of the people are, of course, graduates of fandom. They receive a baptism of fire, or initial shock, when they enter the commercial world. They must forego by necessity their aesthetic desires. Art styles must conform to the reading habits of a certain age group. Printing presses render 4 colours in limited variations; three-dimensional drawings, and rich magentas and aquas, are out. Often this "kills" a graduate student of the Hogarth school. Writing must adhere to the Marvel style. Every issue must be "the greatest ever". Each new character is "the most startling superhero in comicdom", and each cover should lay claim to "the world's greatest comic book". Such guidelines pluck the Shakespeare and the Hemingway out of erstwhile authors. And, in the process of conforming, they lose whatever attachment to fandom they once possessed. Comic books become a vocation, not an avocation, and unless it is a piece in which they are mentioned, many of these new pros take little interest in fanzines. The egotism in all of us still comes out, and for this reason you'll still find them at local conventions or readily accepting free weekends as guests of honour at regional comic art presentations. Most of them start at Marvel, whose demands are less than those at DC. Strangely, the percentage of dropouts is very small. Those that do go on to other careers do so because their growing family requires a greater salary, and more normal working hours to spend time with wife and children. Others have quit staff status and have gone freelance so that they can do some writing for publishers of higher class material. Nevertheless, they all look back, and/or eventually are drawn back to the Marvel Bullpen, because that is where it "happens". -HOWARD P. SIEGEL